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THE NEW RUSSIA

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VELIKI USTJŬG—THE RIVER BANK.

THE NEW RUSSIA

FROM THE WHITE SEA TO THE SIBERIAN STEPPE

BY

ALAN LETHBRIDGE

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a c.

WITH 95 ILLUSTRATIONS FROM PHOTOGRAPHS BY THE AUTHOR AND 3 MAPS

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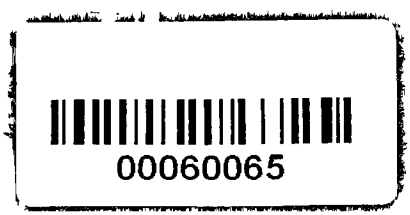

TO

THE BEAUTIFUL AND GRACIOUS MEMORY

OF

H. C. B.

THIS BOOK IS LOVINGLY

DEDICATED

PREFACE

THE journey depicted within the covers of this volume owes its genesis to a chance perusal of Mr. C. V. Hogarth's remarkable translation of Professor Kluchevsky's monumental *History of Russia.* To anyone who would wish to understand the Russia of to-day, that Russia which is astonishing and, if I mistake not, will continue to astonish the British public with its virility, its wealth of resource and the purity of its national ambitions, the above-mentioned work is one of the greatest fascination. For not only does it cover an immensity of historical ground, but certainly, in its translation, it is penned in such a manner as to whet the appetite for a first-hand experience of that wonderful North which is so bound up with the creation of the modern Russian Empire.

At least that was the effect which it had upon me.

For long had I tried to understand the country: during many visits thither and to Siberia I had been struck with the wonderful commercial opportunities which my countrymen had apparently hitherto refused to consider very seriously. As long ago as 1909 I voiced these sentiments in *The Journal of the Canadian Bankers' Association,* and Sir Edward Clouston, since deceased—the then Chairman of this society and President of the Bank of Montreal

—personally thought them of sufficient importance to circularise the article itself through all the chief commercial channels in Canada.

But on this occasion it was the promise of romance which attracted me, and, looking back on the journey, I am bound to say that never was promise better fulfilled. Day by day Russia is becoming better known and more appreciated by her Western Allies. I can recommend the journey north to set the seal upon their good impressions. During a trip of some thousands of miles, through a portion of the country not usually visited by the tourist—or indeed by the business man from other countries—my wife and I never experienced an unkind word nor an offensive action. We were received as guests of honour because we were English, and one and all, official and layman, noble and moujik, tried their best to show their appreciation of our presence.

Other writers with abler pens have described certain aspects of Russian life, but I am certain that none ever approached the task with more sincere pleasure than I. If at moments I have been critical, then I would say that criticism based upon careful consideration of facts and conditions is, in itself, a hall-mark of appreciation. For it is so much easier to accept everything without comment than to accept certain things and object to others. There is much Russia can learn from us, but I am not certain that it counterbalances in the scales the measure of what we can learn from Russia.

If this book should accomplish the end which I had in view—that of arousing a genuine interest in

Slavdom, of adding a few more genuine friends to the little group of Russian admirers—then I shall not have entirely failed in my mission.

And now to my acknowledgments.

To Mr. L. Charles Bentley, of Tilbury, must come my initial thanks. At the last moment when one of my cameras had proved unreliable, he generously offered a substitute and many of the pictures reproduced were taken with his apparatus. To Mr. Woodhouse, British Consul in Petrograd, for the genuine and active interest he displayed, I am more than grateful. To Mr. Thomas Woodhouse, Vice-Consul at Archangel, and to his wife, as well as to Mr. and Mrs. A. Carr of that town, I owe a lasting debt of gratitude for never-failing hospitality and practical hints.

To Mr. Preston, Vice-Consul at Ekaterinburg, I am indebted for much valuable information anent railway and canal development in that district and Siberia generally; whilst to Mr. A. Jordan and his charming wife both my wife and I owe our united affectionate thanks for their kindness and practical assistance to us at Omsk after the declaration of war, a debt we can never repay. With them must be included our good friend Mr. George Atkinson. There are many others whom I should like to thank individually, but that is clearly impossible, though none the less the gratitude is there.

Turning now to assistance in the text, first and foremost I must again acknowledge the historical aid received from Mr. Hogarth's translation of the *History of Russia*. Secondly, I am under obligation

to the Rev. A. Boddy—author of *With Russian Pilgrims*—who kindly gave me permission to reprint "*in toto*" the official account of the bombardment of Solovetz by a British squadron, and from whose book I have gleaned many historical facts and hints. To the Proprietors and Editors of *The Daily Telegraph* and *The Contemporary Review* are also due sincere thanks for permission to reprint the substance of special articles written for them. For the rest, whenever I have received assistance from a literary source I have acknowledged it either in the text or in footnotes, according to suitability.

Finally, to my wife I owe the most tender and loving of thanks. Apart from her encouragement and companionship during a journey which must at times have been tedious, she willingly undertook an immense amount of necessary pick-and-shovel work in connection with advice as to how chapters should be arranged, the rewriting and adjustment of rough copies and the correction of proofs. I in no way exaggerate when I say that if this volume contains anything of merit, it is entirely due to her assistance.

ALAN LETHBRIDGE.

MINEHEAD, *March*, 1915.

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THE NEW RUSSIA

CHAPTER I

THE LURE OF THE RUSSIAN NORTH

"Miles and miles and miles of desolation!
Leagues on leagues on leagues without a change!"

SO wrote Swinburne of the Lincolnshire coast, a portion of England unfrequented by tourists and others in search of the picturesque, a dead-level, sad-featured waste which seems to merge imperceptibly into the equally cold, grey, restless waters of the North Sea. Yet if this sombre vision moved one of England's greatest poets to such expression, then obviously there must be some deep-down attraction in an infinity of loneliness, an attraction which makes itself felt more intensely the longer it is studied.

Multiply these remarks about the Lincolnshire coast a thousand times, and even then that strange, haunting magnetism which for want of a better expression I have called "The Lure of the Russian North" is not adequately expressed. It is a curious fact that, in spite of railways and telegraphs, in spite of daily newspapers and popular literature, in spite of cheap travel and personally conducted tours, no country remains quite so remote from the average intelligence to-day as Russia. And if that be applicable to the great centres of

life and thought such as Petrograd or Moscow, then it is considerably intensified when it comes to the Northern Governments of this vast empire. And, peculiar to relate, even the Russians themselves are not a little inclined to regard askance the immense sweep of those territories.

I remember talking to an old lady on a railway journey between Kief and Warsaw. She was quite typical of the well-to-do travelling Russian and was en route to her villa at Monte Carlo. I casually mentioned that I had it in mind to pay a visit to Archangel and Solovetz Monastery in the summer of the coming year and well do I recall her comic look of astonishment.

"Oh, là-là!" she said, "what do you want to do up in that cold, horrible country? Why not come to Monte Carlo where it is warm?"

I assured her that the sun shone sometimes at Archangel and that, in fact, it could be inconveniently warm. But she did not believe me.

In England the very word "Archangel" appears to conjure up visions of red-nosed, fur-clad, shivering individuals, and several, otherwise, extremely well-educated friends seemed to imagine that Archangel in July promised to be an uncomfortably frigid experience. In fact, the popular idea regarding all this region is as erroneous and incorrect as it well could be.

The reality is so very different; Archangel is seldom as cold as Moscow, while its summers are oftentimes unbearably hot. Save upon the littoral, the White Sea never freezes, and the great plain above the 58th parallel, except in the extreme north, supports a numerous population, possesses unlimited natural resources and eventually will

undoubtedly develop into a rich and prosperous section of the "Russian Land." This huge area, with its illimitable expanse of almost untouched forest, its semi-inaccessible tundra (frozen swamp), its mile upon mile of misty, rolling woodland, gluts the imagination and speaks of an existence as far removed from the hustle of modern progress, from the noise of great cities, from the clash of armed nations, as life is from death. Yet for centuries this area has been occupied, lives have been lived in the deep recesses of the forest, the individual has given place to the family, the family to the settlement and the settlement to the township. And the method of this colonisation, a process occupying literally centuries of never-ceasing conflict with nature in its severest aspect, forms one of the most fascinating chapters of Russian history and flavours the subject with more than a spice of romance.

Long before Moscow became the political capital of Russia it had attained the dignity of being the residence of the Metropolitan, and therefore the ecclesiastical head-quarters of the embryonic empire. By the end of the fourteenth century two currents of widely divergent influence were already making themselves felt, one moving in a north-westerly direction was of a commercial character and does not concern us. The other, moving north-easterly from Moscow, was of a religious character and probably had its genesis in the dissatisfaction felt by certain of the clergy with existing conditions in the Church. With fanatical enthusiasm they longed to lead a pure life in a pure atmosphere, and this led them to eschew the abode of their fellows and more and more to advance into the solitudes of this northern land. The determination and enter-

prise of these monastic pioneers must have been truly remarkable. It is on record that early in the sixteenth century a monk of Novgorod, Trifan by name, had penetrated as far as Pechenga, a spot on the extreme north of the Murman coast not far from the Norwegian frontier, had built a church there and had founded a mission for the Laplanders. The church exists even to the present day. Then again, in the middle of the fifteenth century Zosima and Savatii, two of the most renowned of these anchorites, founded a community on the Island of Solovetz, and doubtless did much towards opening up the White Sea littoral and bringing it to the knowledge of the Russians.

Such pioneers forced their way into all the Northern Governments and, in consequence, in the provinces of Archangel, Olonetz, Vologda, Viatka and Perm, there are still to be found to-day huge monasteries in remote regions, which remind one of the parable of the grain of mustard seed. The probable course of events must have been something like the following: the anchorite would establish himself in his chosen locality, would probably attract one or two more venturesome or hyper-religious spirits and thereon a settlement would be formed. Certain necessaries had to be found—food, material for clothing, simple implements for agricultural purposes and other similar requirements. Owing to the enormous distances and the difficulties of communication these needs had to be supplied locally, and so it was that these communities gradually became regular labour colonies and what, in its origin, was a purely religious and ascetic movement gradually developed into a well-defined process of colonisation. One

cannot but suspect that in those early days these apostles of religion were as much freebooters as priests, and the very harshness of their lives, exposed as they were to possible attacks from wild animals or from such prior occupants of the land as they might chance to encounter, must have made of them trained woodsmen and competent colonists. It would seem that the people they found already in this country were allied to the Finns, and probably were much akin to that race which to-day occupies the northern recesses of the Perm Government, and which is sprinkled along the watersheds of the Vichegda and Petchora Rivers—the Zirians.

In this connection Professor Kluchevsky writes as follows: "Likewise there can be no doubt that the Finnish element played a part in the formation of the facial type of the Great Russian, since his physiognomy does not by any means reproduce every one of the features generally characteristic of the Slav. The high cheek-bones, the dark hair and skin, the squat nose of the Great Russian, all bear credible witness to the influence of a Finnish admixture in his blood."

From the same source it is clear that, with the advance of time, most of these monastic institutions fell from their high estate, exploited the peasantry and, what with feasting and luxury, completely forsook the monastic ideal. On the other hand, however, they appear to have assisted the peasantry with loans of money, though in this connection there was the danger of a moujik remaining, so to speak, in perpetual pawn and thus becoming little removed from the status of a serf. That is one of the outstanding features of Northern Russia—the fact that it never experienced the bane of serfdom. What-

ever the reason may be, apart from the monasteries, this portion of Russia has never known the great landowner. Probably at the time of its colonisation it was regarded as too inhospitable and too uninviting to attract the wealthy boyar, and hence it has been able to grow up strong, free and independent. For the Russian of the North is essentially a fine specimen of humanity. Again I must quote Professor Kluchevsky, whose summing up of the characteristics of the type is so admirable that no other excuse is needed for its inclusion.

"We have seen that the natural features of the country influenced the distribution of Russian settlement and led to the adoption of habitation in small, isolated hamlets. Naturally, this lack of social intercourse did not teach the Great Russian to act in large unions or compact masses. The scene of his labours lay, not in the open field in the sight of all men as did that of the inhabitant of Southern Russia, but in the depths of the primeval forest where, axe in hand, he waxed a strenuous war with nature. It was a silent, secluded struggle in which he was engaged—a struggle with the elemental forces, with the forest and the wild morass—a struggle which left him no time to think of the community nor yet of his feelings and relations towards his fellow-men. This made him self-centred and retiring, cautious and reserved, diffident in public and non-communicative of speech. To this day he is happier when facing a difficult problem alone than when he has solved that problem and has thus drawn upon himself the unwelcome attention of his fellows. Hope of success arouses all his energies, but attainment of success leaves him cold again. To overcome

obstacles and perils comes easier to him than to wear his well-deserved laurels with tact when he has done so. In short, the Great Russian belongs to that type of humanity which deteriorates from the moment that it first becomes aware of its own powers, and is seen to greater advantage in the individual than in the mass.

"We may with reason suppose that every nationality derives from the world around it certain definite impressions which cause it to produce certain definite types, just as a process of grafting produces from a plant flowers of more than one colour. In this evolution of types the physical features of a given region undoubtedly play their part. In the case of the Great Russian, the impossibility of seeing far ahead of him, of formulating any definite plan of action against unforeseen perils or invariably taking the nearest road to a desired point, is strongly reflected in his psychology and modes of thought. The changes and chances of life early taught him to look back whence he had come rather than forward whither he was going. Sudden blizzards or thaws, unexpected August frosts or January mildness, have made him observant rather than provident, attentive to consequences rather than to their prevention, careful of sums-total rather than of their constituent amounts. By some observers he is accused of lack of straightforwardness and sincerity. That is a mistake. True, he often takes two views of a question, but this seeming double-mindedness arises from the fact that, though his mental process leads him to make straight for his goal (ill-considered though the goal often be), he does so looking to either side of him as he goes, even as his

ancestors scanned the surrounding fastnesses which they were forced to traverse. 'Beware lest thou strike thy forehead against a wall; none but crows fly straight,' says a Great Russian proverb. Circumstances and the forces of nature have combined to teach the native of Great Russia to try all roads when making for a given point, and to think and act as he goes along. A symbol of this is to be seen in the ordinary Great Russian country road. What in all the world could be more dilatory and tortuous in its progress than it? Yet, try to go straighter than it goes, and you either end by losing your way altogether or by finding yourself back in its sinuous windings."

This brief résumé of some of the historical aspects of the country as well as of the character of its inhabitants formed the spur which led us to undertake our journey. But first it occurs to me that perhaps a few words anent outfit may be of use to others making a trip to Northern Russia. In all Russian hotels, except in the very big towns, no bed linen is provided except at an extra and sometimes almost prohibitive charge and the same applies to towels, pillow-covers and extra beds. Hence we equipped ourselves with sleeping sacks made in two sections, the second of which one could draw on in case of extreme cold. These sacks were delightfully comfortable and before we finished our journey we numbered them amongst our best friends. In addition, we took a cork mattress, a "Compactum" bedstead for emergencies which proved most useful since in some cases additional beds were not forthcoming, and a canvas travelling bath and wash-hand basin, without which we should have been absolutely lost.

Of other equipment I may make special mention, firstly, of a Doulton filter. Throughout the whole of Russia the drinking water is very bad and a filter is practically a necessity. Recourse can be made, naturally, to the boiling of all water, but it then becomes tasteless and these filters are germ-proof and entirely efficacious. Secondly, we found an eighteen-hour electric lamp a perfect god-send; on the more remote Russian railways the lighting at night consists only of one candle placed in a lamp serving two compartments. Reading is out of the question, and the tediousness of sitting hour after hour in a carriage, doing nothing, needs no emphasis. Finally, I would mention a medicine chest, since doctors are few and far between and a feldscher—an uncertificated physician—is by no means always available. It is a great relief to feel oneself independent, to a certain extent, of the services of a medical man and we carried everything with us that is commonly necessary even down to a hypodermic syringe and a small surgical instrument case.

Additional impedimenta were a large Thermos flask, which incidentally was never used for its legitimate purpose, a spirit-stove, which usually refused to boil anything, and an aluminium "service" canteen for two persons. This latter is made by the Army and Navy Stores, weighs very little and embodies everything from a saucepan to knives, forks and tea-things. That again proved of immeasurable value. I have neglected to mention a mosquito net with a portable frame allowing it to be erected anywhere, an absolute necessity as it turned out, since the mosquitoes, especially in the Urals, are so bad that even the acclimatised moujik

invariably envelops his head in a muslin hood. Two unnecessary pieces of outfit—at least so they proved to be on this occasion—were two Webley and Scott automatic pistols which we had permission to carry from the Ministry of the Interior.

Coming down to the question of weight and convenience of baggage I would say, avoid large boxes of any kind and as far as possible use nothing but handbags, the lightest of suit-cases and the excellent birch-bark boxes which are procurable in Archangel for a few pence and which are both durable and convenient. The Russian himself always travels with a plethora of small luggage, since the railway carriages are provided with enormous racks upon which one could almost sleep oneself, and this fact to some extent militates against the extremely heavy charges made for registered luggage. And what I have said of railways applies equally to post-carts and river steamers.

In travelling in the remoter parts of Russia there is one essential which the visitor must not overlook, and that is he must provide himself with either one of two things: an "otkriti list" (literally, "open paper"), or else a "carte blanche." The former is obtainable from the governor of any province in which one may be travelling and authorises the bearer to have precedence at all post-stations over travellers unprovided with such a document, and to have horses supplied to him at the regulation postal rate. This varies somewhat according to the province and the time of year, but works out roughly at five kopecks a verst (a penny farthing) per horse and, with due regard to the load and to the necessity for expedition, one may employ any-

ARCHANGEL. THE WHARF.
Note the soldiers with prisoners.

To face p. 10.

thing from one horse to three. Such a document is an absolute necessity unless one is lucky enough to be provided with the latter of the two passes of which I have made mention—the "carte blanche." This we were fortunate enough to possess, thanks to the kindly intervention of our own Foreign Office, coupled with the courtesy of M. Maklakov, the Russian Minister for the Interior. Such a document carries one everywhere, as its name implies, and directs all Russian officialdom to assist one in every way possible and, as events proved, after the outbreak of war it was simply a priceless possession.

Our original intention, after arriving at Archangel and making a pilgrimage to Solovetz, had been to travel by post-road to the town of Ust Tsilma on the Petchora River, and thence we hoped to find a way across the Urals to the town of Berezof on the River Ob in Siberia. We knew that there was such a road but in England, needless to say, we could not get the slightest information of any value as to its practicability or otherwise. An alternative route we had in mind was to go up river from Ust Tsilma and find a road across the Urals further south. Eventually both these plans had to be abandoned. In the first place, the road from Ust Tsilma across the Urals to the Ob we found was a matter of doubt even to the officials of the Russian Government at Archangel. They admitted that there was some such track but, not being a post-road, it was liable to be extremely bad; the probabilities also were that there would be no rest-houses of any kind whilst, most important of all, even if we bought horses and a post-cart, there would be no fodder and we should be compelled

to carry everything with us, making, in fact an expedition on a large scale for which we were not prepared. Subsequently, as related elsewhere, we met an Englishman who had approached the same idea from the Berezof end and who, likewise, had given it up owing to the fact that he also was not sufficiently equipped. But the knowledge which we gained was sufficient to whet our appetites and some day we may attempt it again ! ! !

The other proposal, namely to travel southerly upstream from Ust Tsilma, was relinquished largely on the advice of the Secretary to Mons. Bibikoff, the Governor-General of Archangel. He pointed out that the post-road to Ust Tsilma contained no objects of special interest, being a very lonely, deserted track, offered no chances of observation as regards the people since the population consisted only of a few stray Samoyedes, while the scenery was chiefly of the tundra and forest type with which we had already become familiar on the road up from Archangel. His advice, therefore, was " Far better take a more southerly route and work your way towards the Urals, perhaps by the River Vichegda or else by the upper reaches of the Kama." He also warned us that unless we were prepared to face very considerable delay, as well as greatly increased expenses, we should do well to travel as far as possible by river, since in the summer the post-roads are seldom used and the horses are turned out to graze. This we found to be an undeniable fact and, except in Siberia, where in certain sections there is no river transport and mails have to be carried either by horse or motor-car, travelling along the post-roads was out of the question.

It is always easy to be wise after the event, and had we known these few simple facts our itinerary would have been quite different, but having once been committed to the rough draft of our plan we were obliged to do the best we could and attain our object by other and more ordinary methods. Incidentally, this change in our plans proved a blessing in disguise, since our difficulties, which were quite sufficient after the outbreak of war, would otherwise have been multiplied a hundredfold.

I do not propose to give wearisome particulars of our journey to Vologda—the junction on the Russian main line for Archangel. But there is one point which may be of considerable value to other travellers to Russia, and that is the wisdom, if encumbered by much luggage and particularly of new equipment, of going by sea to Petrograd or some other Russian port. There is a heavy protective tariff in Russia, and I have known those who at the start found themselves faced with almost crippling expenses from this cause. It stands to reason that in travelling by railway one is at the mercy of the Customs officials at the frontier stations. At the most there is but a couple of hours in which to haggle, dispute or bargain over what one must legitimately pay, and there is no court of appeal such as that provided by the convenient presence of a British Consul. As an alternative to the payment there is only the doubtful expedient of leaving the goods behind which, of course, spells endless delay and inconvenience. We obviated that altogether and, as it proved, we did not have to have recourse to the Consul. At Petrograd the authorities were courtesy personified. On learning the object of our pro-

posed trip they passed all our baggage "*in toto*" and without any payment whatever.

At Vologda one feels that one is on the threshold of Northern Russia. One leaves the comforts of the main-line Russian train and one is confronted with the delightful prospect of some twenty hours on a little narrow-gauge railway, the engine and carriages of which look as if they had come out of a child's toy-box. Nominally there are the usual three classes, but it is a pure matter of chance whether a composite carriage containing at most two first-class compartments is attached to the train or no. We were lucky and secured one of these miniature coupés to ourselves, but some friends of ours, who were forty-eight hours in advance of us, had the delightful experience of making the journey in a crowded second-class coach in which it was impossible to stretch oneself, and where, owing to the exigencies of the situation, husband and wife had to be separated, the wife unable to speak a word of Russian and on her honeymoon trip!! That episode was sufficient to colour her whole attitude towards the country and I fancy that to this moment she cordially hates it. But the Fates certainly favoured us. When our baggage was stowed away it was possible to sit with some degree of comfort, though at night-time we suffered from the minor inconvenience of the seats being too short to permit of our lying down at full length.

The distance to be covered amounts to four hundred miles and the line is remarkable in that it runs as near as possible as the crow flies and, apparently, abhors the habitations of man since it studiously avoids the few villages *en route* which

it might be expected to serve. It is something of an event—the departure of the Archangel train. The young ladies of Vologda, who apparently have plenty of spare time on their hands, are always on the platform three-quarters of an hour or an hour before it is due to depart and promenade up and down criticising with true feminine instinct the unfortunate passengers. Needless to say there is no buffet-car and wise are they who lay in a stock of provisions at Vologda, a stock, be it said, which should be sufficient in emergency for a couple or three days. Accidents do happen, even on the Archangel line, and foresight in this direction has proved of value. We, however, having lunched heartily took no such precautions and had to learn our lesson by experience.

Everyone connected with the train apparently realises the importance of the occasion. A perfect army of officials accompany it; ticket-collector, inspector, sub-guards, what appeared to be cleaners and, of course, that very important dignitary, the head guard. I must not forget the engine and its staff to whom the shrill scream of the steam whistle must have been as music. They employed it on every possible occasion as though to cheer themselves up as they passed through the lonely wastes of pine-forest and swamp, and its staccato noisiness was worthy of the Flying Scotchman. One little act of courtesy I must not forget to chronicle. In the other first-class coupé there were five unhappy travellers but, as soon as they saw that there was a lady with me, not only did they not complain at their cramped quarters, but by little acts of kindness tried to show that they appreciated the situation and that we were, so to speak, guests of honour in their country.

As soon as one leaves Vologda there is a rapid change in the general features of the landscape; the long rolling fields dotted at intervals with funny little low thatched cottages give place to the sombre silences of undisturbed pine-forests. Little by little signs of human habitation disappear, and there is a solemn brooding quiet which envelops the atmosphere and which can almost make itself felt. As one passes through this land of the unknown one's imagination runs riot. What manner of men were those who forced their way through these fastnesses centuries ago, and who braved the terrors of these still unmapped wastes? For there is a silent, comprehensive terror which can be inspired by watching mile after mile of this never-ending procession of pine, birch and occasional larch trees, the latter standing like outposts in an army clothed with a deep, mysterious green. At long intervals of thirty-five versts or more one catches sight of eight or a dozen khaki-coloured posts with black tops arranged in parallel rows on either side of the railway,—level crossings, in most cases, of the future. Otherwise, *raison d'être* they appear to have none.

Somewhere, miles and miles away, there may be a village and these forlorn sign-posts mark its entry into the social hegemony of an empire. But to us, they are reminiscent of the ruthless gashes into a newly acquired building lot hacked by an enthusiastic real-estate agent, whose fancy has been tickled by dreams of future greatness and who dares to sully the hitherto unbroken seclusion by ugly sign-posts bearing suggestive names such as Montrose Avenue or Sunnydale Road. And, in fact, in this strange twilight land, these recurrent

evidences of human handiwork serve suitably to show that the engineer, the surveyor and the navvy have left their mark, passed on, and been swallowed up in the void of the beyond, bequeathing to others the larger and more material task of exploitation and settlement. For of all Northern Russia this is perhaps a portion of the most lonely. Again and again the railway seems to skim over the surface of quaking bogs upon which nothing grows except patches of rank grass and the smallest of stunted undergrowth. Yet, in the very intensity of its loneliness it is fascinating. Those whose fate it is to live in the crowded areas of the West can experience a new sensation if they will but try to peer into the mystic depths of this undisturbed expanse.

The railway stations come as a welcome break in the monotony, alike to passengers and to the peasant. They have all been built on precisely similar models and, as a rule, there is no pretence of a buffet. Of course, however, there is the steaming samovar where upon payment of one kopeck (a farthing), unlimited hot water may be obtained. From the third-class carriages there is a greedy exodus and the moujiks hustle and fight for the wherewithal to make their tea, without which they would be completely lost.

And if the departure of the train from Vologda is an occasion, doubly so is its arrival at these wayside halts. It is the opportunity of general hand-shaking. The whole of the train staff descends with alacrity and cordially greets the whole of the station staff; for the time being, which is sometimes as much as thirty minutes, such mundane things as passengers and goods—the trains are always mixed as to passengers and goods—are

relegated to the background. One bell is struck; some of the more important luminaries salute, shake hands and then continue to talk. A few women, barefooted and holding babies in their arms, gaze solemnly and rather apathetically at the train. Not even the presence of obvious foreigners can rouse them to that sense of enthusiastic curiosity which is one of the commonest traits of the peasant in the Russian North. A second bell sounds. There is more handshaking accompanied this time by deep, reverential bows, but no end to the interminable conversation. A few heavily booted moujiks scuttle back across the platform with their little blue tea-kettles from which the steam puffs merrily. Otherwise things are very much the same as they were before and one begins to wonder whether the train has decided to remain here for the night. Then, at last, a third bell rings accompanied by a reverberating shriek from the engine. On this occasion not only are hands shaken and bows exchanged, but even a kiss or two is observable amongst the members of the railway staff. This really is the prelude to starting. Life is a serious thing in these parts and must be taken seriously. We blatant Westerners, with our exaggerated ideas of our own importance, of time and of such-like matters, are consequently quite out of focus in the general picture, and not the least delightful aspect of the case is the fact that both official and civilian are also quite assured that we have no portion in the little round of their existence. And hence with the utmost courtesy we are completely and quietly ignored.

At about eight o'clock in the evening, the train having left at noon, the conductor informs us that

ARCHANGEL. A VENDOR OF NATIVE HOMESPUN.
This is quite renowned for its colour and texture.

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in a few minutes we shall be at the only buffet on the whole line between Archangel and Vologda. Our spirits rise high. The crisp, cool air of the evening has already worked its wicked will and the prospect of something hot to eat, possibly a good zrazi—a sort of elaborated rissole—seems enticing. With our usual accompaniment of crescendo whistling we steam into the station and, accompanied by the guard who good-naturedly volunteers to show me the way, I make a dash towards the buffet. And then I realise that I have made a mistake at Vologda! There are some uninviting slabs of peculiarly deep red sausage, black bread in plenty, and I am able to purchase a couple of bottles of drinkable Crimean wine. But the bortsch (beetroot soup) and zrazi are conspicuous by their absence. However, it is wonderful what hunger will do, and as we sit in our poky little coupé, watching the everlasting pine-clad panorama, we eat our frugal meal with more gusto than ever we tackled a supper at the Carlton.

The steady rumbling of the train is sleep producing. Already it is sufficiently warm to have the railway carriage windows down and the slightest of breezes wafts with it the full scent of the pines Never has breeze seemed so powerful in its fragrance, so nerve restoring and so soothing. The past weeks have not been without their worries and their anxieties, now being rapidly anæsthetised by this balm of the North. Out come our sleeping sacks—their initial trial—and five minutes later two drowsy people are vowing that there are worse places than Northern Russia and that even the Vologda-Archangel express has some points in its favour.

CHAPTER II

ARCHANGEL

WHAT could have been a happier augury for our arrival at Archangel than a brilliant morning with the bluest of blue skies? But at Isaacogorka, the last station before our destination, we learned that what with the ice which was fast coming down the Dwina, and the extensive floods which this year had almost constituted a record, it was quite on the cards that we might even now be unable to reach Archangel. Isaacogorka is not exactly an attractive spot, consisting as it does of a little railway station, "Sans wine, sans food, sans everything." Hence the prospect was not exhilarating and our spirits gradually dropped to zero as a porter, who had come on the train to look after our luggage, recounted with much gusto the fate of our honeymoon couple who, two days previously, had arrived at the Archangel railway station, but had been unable to reach the town.

"Yes, Barin," he said, "the ice had begun to move, so what could they do? We gave them tea and black bread, and they went back to Vologda. But, nichevo! You will be all right to-day I think."

The train grumbled and creaked along and we began to see evidences of the spring flood. On either side, as far as the eye could reach, stretched

mile upon mile of muddy water, slush and piled-up fragments of ice. Gradually the water encroached upon the permanent way and, at length, at the bottom of an embankment, surrounded by a miscellaneous collection of ice, logs, driftwood and refuse, we saw a small and distinctly unclean steamer—the ferry to Archangel. It was as though we had arrived at the world's end; Archangel was nowhere visible. However, with the aid of some good-natured jostling, plus a tremendous amount of patience, plus the exchange of some coin of the realm, plus some gymnastic agility, we finally got aboard.

We were a motley crowd; a commercial traveller, evidently a German, intent on catching the early worm; two young girls—Poles—who were going as artistes to an Archangel Café Chantant; a sailor belonging to the Disciplinary Battalion stationed in the White Sea, but who looked happy enough; moujiks in big felt boots over which were again sea boots, and sheepskin coats; a couple of Samoyede traders conspicuous by the gorgeousness of their raiment; several forestry officials en route to take up their duties in the lonely North; and a Zirian student, homeward bound from a course of study in Petrograd.

A keen wind was blowing from the north, but we most of us preferred the fresh, cold air to the stuffy warmth of a little cabin already sufficiently perfumed with "Bouquet de Moujik." The Polish girls were only too willing to enter into conversation. And since one of them had been to Archangel before, she was full of information of a pessimistic sort. We had thought it bad getting on the boat? Well, we must wait until it came to getting off, and we should

see what we thought of that. A friend of hers, in accomplishing the operation, had slipped between two logs on the mud at the nominal landing-stage and had broken both ankles. We also gathered that the hotels were habitually full, most expensive and very bad. What on earth could we want to come to Archangel for when there was all the rest of the world to visit? Had we ever been in Poland, and didn't we think Warsaw the most beautiful city in the world? Most emphatically we did not. Then there was no accounting for taste, but she had always heard that English people were inclined to be eccentric.

All this time we had been slowly bumping our way down an inlet into the main stream of the Dwina across which we surged through masses of floating ice. Then, of a sudden, Archangel hove into sight as we steamed round a flooded timber-yard situated on the left bank of the river, and which now stood out gaunt and island-like in the midst of the surrounding desolation. Half a mile away across the rapid-flowing, chocolate-coloured flood rose the green and gold spire of the church of St. Michael from which the town takes its name. The landing was disagreeable. It consisted chiefly of unpleasantly long passages over unpleasantly greasy planks, themselves not too well-balanced, a fall from one of which would at least have spelt a bath in grey slime. Not that anyone took any notice of it. One of the foresters explained that under normal conditions the landing was made upon a pontoon, and for the rest, as is ever the case in Russia, they accepted the inconveniences with their usual philosophy.

We had been given the address of the Hotel

Central, which sounded promising. Visions of the "Great Central" in London passed through my wife's brain, since hunger plays strange pranks and we had had nothing all day except a glass of tea apiece and it was now close on two o'clock. To the "Central," therefore, we went, creating quite an impression, as the Archangel cabs are only capable of containing a couple of bags each and we had much luggage. The Hotel Central seemed at first disinclined to receive us, since it required five minutes' exercise on the front-door bell to unearth anyone. Then we learned that we were the first arrivals that spring, and that all the rooms in the house were at our service. But, alas and alack, there was no restaurant, and we should have to take our meals at one of the many cafés of which Archangel boasts.

Undoubtedly we had the pick of the rooms. It was very large, scrupulously clean and peculiarly furnished. It would have been an excellent place for a board-meeting, since, besides two writing-tables, there were twenty-one chairs of the most rigid and ascetic type. We were supposed to sleep hidden away behind a match-board partition—the Russians are very fond of this system in the smaller hotels. The walls were bare and distempered, the wood floors uncovered but varnished. Of the three large windows, none would open and, curiously enough, the heat of the sun, even on the day of our arrival, showed that Archangel could be grilling. For this accommodation, minus bed and bath linen, we paid R.4.50 a day (nine shillings and sixpence!). We began to think that our Polish informant had not exaggerated.

But food was uppermost in our minds, and we

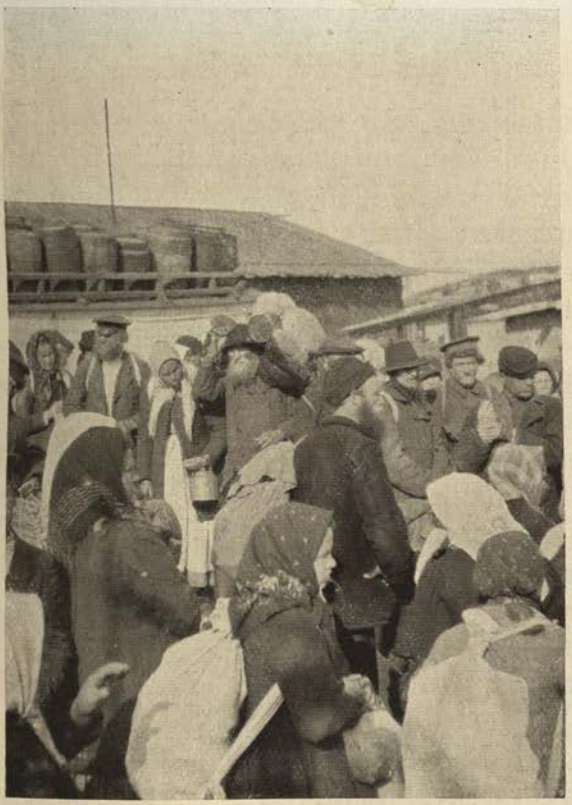
gladly made our way to the "Offitziantov," which is the chief restaurant of the town. Of this restaurant there is nothing to say but praise. But since it is typical of others which are springing up in modern Russia, it deserves some description.

Briefly then, its employés, waiters, cooks, etc., are the owners, belonging to an Artel or Union, and all profits and tips go into a common pool and are divided. The result is obvious. The cook does his best, the waiter does his best, the dvornik his best for the common weal, emphasising once more the spirit of co-operation which has been inbred in the Russian nature.

Archangel is distinctly a town of restaurants. Business is conducted in them and five o'clock in the morning will see the same clientèle, who had earlier conversed of timber and freights, now amusing themselves. There will be the inevitable Ladies' Orchestra, again a Russian feature and found even in remote Siberian towns; often there are singers, sometimes there are gipsies. Needless to say, in these early hours when the wine has circulated freely, there is an hilarious informality which sometimes produces amusing results.

I well remember witnessing the following episode.

A gentleman, well known in Archangel society, had given a dinner to some of his male acquaintances and a very jolly evening had been passed. Amongst the guests was an extremely good-looking and smart officer whom we had christened "The Squire of Dames." At length the time arrived to pay the account, and its proportions, judging from the length of the document, were truly staggering. Certainly the host was perceptibly nonplussed. In vain he went over the items, in vain he totted up



ARCHANGEL. PILGRIMS.

ARCHANGEL. BIRCH-BARK BUTTER BOXES.

Birch bark enters largely into the manufacture of everyday articles.

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the figures; the matter brooked of no argument and so off he went to interview the manager as a last resource. Meantime his friends had again become thirsty, and the Squire of Dames suggested a bottle of bénédictine—of all things—as a stirrup cup. It was duly brought and the health of the absent host was drunk with great enthusiasm. Then the host returned.

"My friend," said the Squire of Dames, "we have been drinking your health in bénédictine in your absence. If you will order one more bottle, we will drink it again in your presence."

Result: apoplectic rage of the host who was handed an additional bill for about fifteen roubles, indignation of the Squire of Dames who sought consolation for his injured amour propre with the ladies of the orchestra, and a truly appalling clamour of explanation, expostulation and objurgation from host and guests alike. One officer drew his sword and demanded instant satisfaction; the host's pince-nez were incidentally broken by a vehement gesture from another, while the Squire of Dames wept gently on the sympathetic shoulder of the flutist.

Then the host had a happy thought. "After all," he said, "life is very short. We *will* have another bottle of bénédictine!"

And they did—several.

On another occasion as we were dining, a Russian officer took his seat at an adjoining table and started by politely asking if he might have the honour of drinking our healths. Naturally, we assented and returned the compliment. He then broke into one of the most curious conversations to which I have ever listened. It was a strange medley

of French and German. Russian he would not speak, English he could not. With great gravity he informed us that he was the loneliest man in the world, that he had three times attempted suicide, that Archangel was only fit for dogs and that he wished he were back in the Nevsky. He then suggested accompanying us home or to any other place we might choose, whereon we hastily said that we were going to the British Consulate. This prospect apparently appalled him, so he bade us a gloomy farewell.

I would emphasise one fact, namely, that the Russian in his cups is invariably polite, no matter what his social station.

One more tale of restaurant life, which opens up a large and extremely controversial train of thought.

We casually noticed two young men who were very noisy, most self-conscious and evidently keen on attracting attention. The one was ill-groomed, unkempt and unwashed; his lank fair hair badly needed the attention of the barber, his eyes were red-rimmed and bloodshot. His complexion was unhealthy and spotted, and his hands, with which he gesticulated greatly, while as effeminate as a woman's and bearing no traces of manual labour, were filthy. His shirt was cuffless and as collar he wore a discoloured muffler. The other, his junior in years, evidently took more pains with his personal appearance, but a sloping forehead and a runaway chin, coupled with an obvious pleasure in attitudinising gave one the impression of a weak-minded character rendered unstable by an excess of personal vanity. Such an one might easily become a megalomaniac.

This couple quickly labelled us as English, and the former, in order to display his linguistic accomplishments, named a few of the dishes before him in that language, much to the mystification of his companion. They then had a quarrel as to how much the waiter should receive by way of a tip, wrangling a full half-hour over a five-kopeck piece. Eventually they gave him nothing. Moved by curiosity after they had gone, we asked the waiter who they were, and were told "politicals." "They teach," said our informant, "and make a bit of money that way. We never expect anything from them. They are more trouble than they are worth, but we cannot very well turn them out."

There are quite a number of politicals, i.e. offenders of the political type, who are sent for a longer or shorter period to Archangel and its neighbouring villages. With the exception that their wings are effectively clipped as far as doing mischief is concerned, and that money is scarce with them, they have nothing of which to complain. In England one hears wonderful stories of the suffering these folk endure in the sacred cause of justice. And since, moreover, they drift over to England when possible, where they receive a warm welcome at the hands of a certain section of the tender-hearted public who have preconceived ideas of their own anent Russia and her administration, these refugees manage to place their own case before the eyes of the world.

For the other side there is no apologist, and hence it is not surprising that the true facts of the entire question are not shown in their proper perspective. An eminent professor of a Canadian university once told me that he reckoned it took one-third of a

century to eradicate an idea from the minds of the people and another third of a century to instil a new one. I am beginning to think that à propos of these political offenders and the British attitude, this statement is correct. Certainly, speaking generally of the irreconcilables with whom I have come into personal contact, it would appear that either they have no proposed panacea for the ills they profess to wish to cure, being dreamers or theoreticians run amok, or that they are adherents of a consistently destructive policy with no notion of the necessity of constructive action to take its place.

Of the first class it may be remarked that the type is common in Russia because of the marvellous receptivity of the Slav mind. Without the centuries of political independence and education behind them common to Western European nations, they assimilate the philosophies of the most advanced thinkers with alarming rapidity and a species of mental indigestion ensues. Their impatience to see the world as they would have it and, incidentally, as it will never be, acts as the greatest hindrance to the adoption of the forms which, while only slightly in accordance with their ideals, at least bespeak an advance along the lines they so passionately advocate. That there must be delay, that education costs money and organisation, that a policy of "Agin the Government" is no policy, that the condition of the moujik is comparatively no worse than that of the agricultural labourer in England, that without some sort of governmental discipline society would drift into seething chaos, and that in a multiplicity of widely differing counsel there can only be failure, unless some central aim be steadily

pursued and no heed paid to emotional and ill-balanced clamour—to all of this they are blissfully oblivious. They have lent no ear to the doctrine enunciated by Kipling in his line, "If you can dream and not make dreams your master." On the contrary, their dreams do master them, and it is these visions of the night which they insist upon having materialised with the wave of the magician's wand. And because the era of miracles is passed, they become disgruntled, disheartened, disbelieving and disgusted. That the true essence of statesmanship consists of constructive formulæ has apparently never struck them yet; if they could be induced to view the matter from that standpoint, instead of proving a constant thorn in the administrative side, they would at once form a valuable and powerful influence for the public weal. No one queries the honesty of their motives; it is merely a phase of misapplied energy founded upon emotional impulse.

Of the adherents of the consistently destructive policy it is difficult to write patiently. To use plain unvarnished English, they are blatantly mischievous and no one can blame any administrative measures of which they make themselves the victims. Prating of the rights of the individual and of the injustice of Governments, they make it their life's mission to sow discord, stir up discontent and incite to violence. They stand for the negation of every moral principle framed by religion, let alone ethics, since the creation of man, clothing this negation in a garment of hypocritical "Comradeship."

A case in point. The daughter of a well-to-do timber merchant at Archangel, a pretty and, until then, well-balanced girl with a delightful home and doting parents, suddenly embraced this cause. She

discarded the amenities of the life of one in her station, and began to associate with the bargees on the Dwina and the riffraff always to be met with in sea or river ports. While preaching her crusade of "Freedom," she travelled with these people by land and water, and the burden of her song was, approximately, "Away with your masters, my comrades! Destroy, ruin, burn, and then you will be free."

Glorious and magnificent humbug!!

At first she was not taken very seriously, but when she left inflammatory pamphlets at her father's and her uncle's mills, recommending a rising against the managements and, in so many words, suggesting the destruction of the properties, thereby imperilling lives, it was realised that the danger zone had been entered. Imprisoned for some months at Petrograd, through high influence she was released and immediately started upon her evil courses with increased vehemence. Again she was placed under control, and there can be little doubt that her fate will be exile to Siberia for a long term of years. Meantime her mother has died of a broken heart, her father has become a changed man and her relatives have disowned her. Incidentally I would add that the mills in question are owned by the most considerate employers of labour in Northern Russia, and that the girl's whole attitude, besides being inconceivably foolish, was based upon some disordered and diseased jumble of philosophic theses, which were supposed to prove that crime alone could offer a cure for the troubles and unrest inseparable from any movement in the body social, and common to all countries in all ages. It is this attitude of destruction which well-meaning foreigners not only tolerate but tacitly encourage,

owing to their being misinformed anent local conditions and ignorant of the actual facts.

Before leaving this somewhat unpleasant topic, I would emphasise one more point by yet another instance.

I met in London a young Russian lady of the best birth and liberally endowed with brains and beauty. In most ways she was entirely and completely normal, but if once she started to discuss the government of her own country she appeared to lose all sense of proportion. Yet she argued not from facts, but from surmises. In one breath she would admit that she had not been in Russia since the days of her early childhood and in the next she would none the less condemn the whole framework of Russian administration. Asked to be precise she could not; corner her, and she would answer, "How should I know? I have not been there." In fact, she was one of those who firstly do not want to know, and secondly, who frame their whole line of action and thought, not upon facts as they are, but upon what they would themselves like them to be. It is hopeless to argue with those who adopt this attitude, the obvious course being to let them well alone to ponder at their leisure over their imaginary wrongs.

But, unfortunately, being travellers from a far country, they obtain the credence of a certain proportion of the public, and hence are responsible for untold harm. This same lady told me frankly and in so many words, that she believed in murder as an easy and effective cure of any administrative injustice ! ! !

There is something peculiarly intimate about the town of Archangel which lends to it a charm of its own. Partly on account of its seven months of

winter, when the hours of daylight are very few and when much work is out of the question, everyone comes to know everyone else, their affairs, their business, their good points and their bad points—in fact, it is not very unlike an enormous family. Everything is taken in good part. The Vice-Governor will congratulate his host upon the quality of his wine and the host will smilingly remark that it *is* good wine and that he got it from the captain of a merchant steamer, in other words, that it was smuggled.

I should be inclined to describe smuggling as apparently one of the most popular summer amusements in Archangel. It provides great scope for smartness and acumen, and is just tinged with that element of danger which adds to the fascination of all sport. It is carried on sometimes apparently quite openly, great cases being dumped over the side of an ocean steamer on to a tug in broad daylight; or it may be only a matter of a few bottles of whisky dropped into the river at high water and rescued therefrom after dusk. Many are the stories which are told of the outwitting of the Customs officials.

On one occasion, the head of the Customs department threw doubts upon the amount of smuggling reported to be going on, and promptly took up a bet with a prominent Archangel resident when the latter stated categorically that he could easily land a couple of dozen of whisky under the officer's very nose. About two days later the pair happened to meet on a ship which was loading supplies. Amongst other stuff a large keg of butcher's meat was brought aboard and placed in the galley. Ten minutes later sounds of a heated discussion could be heard and the

cook came up to the group, now augmented by the captain, with a bit of meat in his hand which he said was unfit for human food.

"Is it all like this?" he was asked, and the answer being in the affirmative, he was told to send it all ashore again, and off it was trundled. The Customs officer and the resident watched it recede into the distance, and then with a smile the resident said, "Now I think I'll trouble you for that forty roubles." "How?" queried the other. "I have won my bet," was the answer. "That wasn't meat you saw going ashore; that was whisky, with a layer of meat on the top."

Collapse of Customs official!

On another occasion one of the Shore Guards was coaxed on board a ship which, of course, is strictly forbidden, by the promise of a glass of beer. Once on board he received his beer as promised, but was, in addition, locked into a cabin looking on to the gangway. His disgust was great when he saw being rolled ashore the largest Cheshire cheese which had been seen in Archangel for many a long day. As the proud possessor of it remarked, "It was an awkward sort of thing to smuggle." But I have also heard that in this direction nothing is impossible even down to a grand piano.

Archangel, with its suburb of Solombola, really consists of one long street, the Troitzky, which extends for a distance of about seven miles. The town and its suburb is connected by an immense wooden bridge of at least half a mile in length. Every winter it has to be dismantled at an enormous expense, but such is the businesslike attitude of the municipality that they are unable to see that though the cost of a permanent structure would be considerable, the

interest on the capital outlay would be far less than the annual charges they are now called upon to meet.

The streets are innocent of paving, and in the lesser thoroughfares the side-walk no longer occupies its normal position, but enjoys the centre of the road —why, no one could tell me. Such an arrangement is inconvenient, it might be imagined, for wheeled traffic, but the Archangel "isvostchik" cares for none of these things and cheerfully drives his cab over even more formidable obstacles, leaving his fare to hold on as best he may.

Quite a feature of Archangel is the number of large sacred pictures adorning the outside of many of the houses. Sanctuary lamps burn perpetually in front of them, and the hurrying crowds find time to stop, reverently to murmur a prayer and devoutly to cross themselves before proceeding on their way. Truly Russia is an enigma among countries. There are those who talk of superstition and shrug their shoulders contemptuously at such outward and visible signs of the moujik's credo. But surely there is something emblematic of a nation's soul in these simple acts, something of a deeper import than the casual observer might imagine. And in time the sincerity of this devotion in the Russian will be understood and credited at its correct value. That will be the day when we in England put away from us all the old false notions anent Slavdom and grasp the purity, strength and beauty of the real Russia.

Fine churches in Archangel there are none. The cathedral alone is of any size, and, like all churches in Northern Russia, is a "double-decker"—that is to say, it consists of an upper church and a lower church. In the summer, the former is used, and in

ARCHANGEL. A TYPICAL STREET.

Note the pavement which runs down the middle instead of along the sides.

ARCHANGEL. TROITZKY PROSPECT.

To face p. 34.

the winter the latter, but as a rule this system leads to both being built low and liable, naturally, to be stuffy.

There is one tiny little edifice, however, which is infinitely touching—a chapel erected upon the wharf at Solombola by the offerings of the sailors and dedicated to Our Lady, Star of the Sea. Upon the exterior is a large allegorical painting representing Our Lady assisting to safety a drowning seaman.

For visitors, of course, the chief interest of the place is focussed in the market and its vicinity. This market, or bazaar as it is called, is a fascinating place. The Rag Fair in Paris, the Caledonian Market in London, the Campo de Fiori in Rome, lag far behind in unconscious picturesqueness. This is a serpentine market; it begins abruptly in the middle of the street and, winding down to the water's edge, it crawls round a corner and begins again. Church towers and the masts of swaying fishing smacks form the background. All the old women in the place buy and sell, haggle and barter, gossip and drink tea. Their wares, be they butter, eggs or poultry, are covered with bits of worn home-spun woven in strips of blue, gold and old rose. These women form attractive studies; they are brown and sturdy with round wrinkled faces which crinkle up like withered apples when they laugh. Perhaps the most distinctive wares are those made from birch bark—shoes, hampers, large and small, and butter boxes. Of birch-bark shoes much might be written; we have Mr. Stephen Graham's word for it that they are not uncomfortable, but that after wearing them, he understood why the Russian moujik ambles along so leisurely—he could not possibly walk fast in them. Of the birch-bark

hampers, which can be purchased for the modest sum of twenty kopecks (5d.), the best testimonial I can offer is the bare statement that we used one throughout our journey as a tea-basket and portable larder, that it covered approximately some ten thousand miles, that it came back with us to England, and that it now reposes in the luggage-room ready and waiting for fresh adventures.

There is one aspect of Archangel which I must not forget to mention. It is, *par excellence*, the paradise of the antique hunter. The mere mention of Russian enamel makes the mouth water, and with time it has grown increasingly rare. Of course, in the large centres of population and on the beaten track, anything of the nature is snapped up in a moment at a very high price. In Archangel this is different. As I have remarked in a preceding chapter, monastic expansion took a north-easterly direction with the result that in these parts there were monks and anchorites long before there were normal settlers. Hence it is that to-day it is often possible to find both interesting and valuable relics of that date. And often they are in the hands of people who have not the faintest idea of their significance or value. Thus, for instance, I had many dealings with a friendly Samoyede. He was a curious product of civilisation, who sported a large brass watch-chain about the size of a ship's cable and a very faded frock-coat. When he came upon matters of high import, he invariably prefaced his remarks with a prayerful appeal to the ikon in the corner of the room and was always particular at the completion of a bargain to explain that anything in the nature of a "nachai" (a tip) would be expended upon nothing stronger than tea. As for vodka, no, he

ARCHANGEL. A BIRCH-BARK SHOE MERCHANT.

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had never tasted it, it was a horrible, sinful stuff; in fact, he was an incorrigible old humbug. One morning, as was his custom, he paid me a visit and said he had brought with him some very rare and curious articles which he was perfectly certain I should appreciate.

One was a very beautiful little ikon of the Blessed Virgin in blue, green and white enamel of the period of Ivan the Terrible. For this he asked two roubles. The next article was a five-pfennig piece, date 1613, in a fine state of preservation, and for that he also asked two roubles. The third article on the list was a very large and excessively ugly conch shell, which he insisted on placing near my ear in order that I could hear what he called "the music." For that he wanted five roubles. I gave him what he demanded for the first-named and left the remainder for some other fortunate purchaser.

No account of Archangel would be complete without some mention of its staple industry of timber. Time was when numberless British firms had offices in the neighbourhood, but since the Crimean War British control of the industry has declined and to-day there is only one purely British firm in the business. It may be hazarded that one timber mill is very much like another, but as a matter of fact there are certain aspects about these mills which are worthy of comment. It may come as a surprise to good Britishers to be told that, broadly speaking, Russian factory legislation is ahead of our own. At one of the mills I visited, I was much struck by a large co-operative store, which feature, I understand, is obligatory with all factories employing over a certain number of men. Here could be purchased such staple articles of food as bread, tea, sausage,

cucumbers, etc., at the very minimum prices, a matter of no small importance to these workers. Further, there was a fully equipped hospital with twelve beds and a resident feldscher. Thus anyone sick or sorry could have instant treatment free, gratis and for nothing. Further, in the event of their death, they are also buried at the expense of the firm.

The men usually live on the mill in specially built huts; a church and school are provided for them, and, in fact, everything possible is done for their material and moral welfare. Consequently, discontent among the workers is rare and the strikes which have occurred have been caused by those professional agitators of whom I have made mention.

I might also add that there is a system of sick insurance by which all workers are compelled to contribute a certain portion of their weekly wage, which payment is nearly doubled by the employer, the proportion being actually three-fifths to two-fifths.* By this means it is hoped to guard against workmen ever being penniless through sickness or mischance. And finally, in this connection, I would mention that a good timber hand receives high wages, as much as sixty roubles a month.

Not much attempt is made at reafforestation, the supply of timber is so huge and the area to be tapped so immense, that hitherto it has not been thought necessary. It is estimated that, not including Siberia where the wealth of forest-land beggars description, there is sufficient timber in European Russia alone to last six hundred years; and this in spite of the forest fires which annually sweep away

* For fuller particulars vide *Russian Year Book*, 1914 ed.

ARCHANGEL. CHURCH OF OUR LADY OF THE SEA.
Note the fresco of the sailor being saved from drowning.

ARCHANGEL. A THING OF THE PAST—"THE VODKA WHARF."

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many millions of acres. Out of curiosity I jotted down the following list of fires which were reported in a daily paper during one day in July.

In the Archangel Government three fires of unknown extent were raging in the White Sea region, while contiguous to the Vologda Government there was one estimated at over 70,000 acres, which was necessitating the employment of soldiers from Petrograd to quell it. In the Vitebsk Government there were 25,000 acres burning, while in the Vladimirsky Government a great fire was raging, extent unknown. Vologda reported one fire of 12,000 acres, one of 36,000 and railway communication was being hampered. From Kostroma five fires were reported in different sections of great value. In the Baltic provinces twenty fires were reported, covering approximately an area of 8000 acres and railway communication was seriously impeded. Novgorod boasted of six blazes and added the information that soldiers, police and peasantry were fighting hard. Pskoff admitted 3700 acres burnt clear. In Riazan, two villages were totally destroyed. From Samara and Tver came news that there were fifty different fires which were taking a serious turn, timber and turf burning wholesale. And finally, Yaroslav troubled not about unnecessary details but contented itself with the curt message, "Extent of fire enormous and beyond control; river navigation being carried on under most difficult circumstances owing to smoke."

From that brief résumé of one day's forest fires, it can be realised that here Russia is face to face with a problem of appalling importance. It is not a question only of commercial waste, but of the terrible death roll which is beyond estimate and indeed

never becomes public. Whole villages pass in the night and the morning sun shines down upon acres of desolation where once man dwelt. It is difficult to see what precautions can be adopted effectually to stop this scourge, but on the other hand it does appear for some reason or other that Russia feels her forest fires to a greater extent than other wooded areas, such, for instance, as Canada.

We were sorry to say good-bye to Archangel. In spite of its manifest drawbacks few towns extend —or so it seemed to us—so friendly a welcome to the stranger within its gates. Nowhere can be found wider sympathy or warmer cordiality than that offered to the bird of passage by its inhabitants. We often regret that its situation is such as to render a journey thither somewhat of an undertaking, for to those who are receptive of something more than mere external impressions, it possesses an elusive, yet lasting, charm of its own which neither time nor distance can eradicate.

CHAPTER III

SOLOVETZ: ITS HISTORY AND ASSOCIATIONS

IT has always appeared to me that a great flavour of romance attaches to the Church in Russia. It is not because its outward and visible signs, as evidenced by its churches, are strangely bizarre and fantastic, or because its rites and ceremonies are impregnated with the fragrance of the East. But rather is the history of the Church one of the deepest fascination, since it mirrors the development of the nation far more intimately than do the Western Churches, owing to the fact that over this whole vast area, in one way or another, it has been responsible for the national evolution.

In a preceding chapter I made mention of the remarkable work of those monastic pioneers and anchorites to whom Russia owes the discovery and colonisation of the great north-eastern plain. An enchanting theme in itself! But the pinnacle of romantic mysticism must surely be reached in the island monastery of Solovetz.

To consider the bare facts as they are. This little cluster of islands, of which Solovetz is the largest, lies in the White Sea, approximately two hundred miles north-west from Archangel. It is a wild, desolate coast in these parts and the White Sea can whip itself up into a fury in the space of an hour or two when there will be experienced as heavy weather as any sailor wants to meet. In addition,

for seven months out of the twelve, any communication with the mainland is a hazardous operation on account of ice and, finally, for five months out of the twelve, there is practically no daylight. Such are the conditions at the present day. What, then, must have been the position of affairs when its pious founders gave it birth, and does not the mere statement of these facts portray the essence of the romance surrounding this huge monastic fortress and whet the appetite for further facts concerning its history? Hence, before describing present-day Solovetz, I may perhaps be forgiven for a slight historical digression.

As far back as the middle of the fifteenth century a monk of the name of Savatii, who had received the tonsure at Bielozerski—a Northern Russian town of some importance—left civilisation in search of that solitude which was so dear to him, and in the wild regions of the north met with a fellow ascetic named "German." Together they crossed to the isles of Solovetz. German appears to have separated from Savatii since he (German), retracing his steps to the mainland, met in his turn with another monk named Zosima who, having heard of the wild wonders of Solovetz, crossed the sea with him and thus founded a small fraternity. The fame of the life of these hermits rapidly attracted followers, and finally Zosima — Savatii having meantime died — journeyed to Novgorod the Great where he received the Abbot's crozier together with a decree ceding to him and his followers the island in perpetuity. This charter is still preserved in the vestry of Solovetz and runs thus:

* "This doth give Martha Isaakova of Great

* *With Russian Pilgrims.* Rev. A. Boddy.

Novgorod the Posadnitsa to the Holy Spas (Saviour), on Solovetz to the Igumen Zosima and the holy men and monks thereof, her manor on the sea-coast, fisheries, earth and water, harvest land and woods, whilom possessed by me Martha, to be possessed by the Igumen and monks for ever and whoever takes away my land from them, he and I have to be judged before Christ.

"MARTHA THE POSADNITSA.

"At the giving of this was present my Father Confessor, Priest of St. Sophia and Alexei Barchatov: and this was written by my son Fedor Issakov, in the year 6978 (A.D. 1470)."

The next event of supreme importance in the life of the "Obitel" (monastery) was the part played by the great Archimandrite St. Philip who became Metropolitan of Moscow in the year 1565 during the reign of Ivan the Terrible. Belonging to the noble family of Kolicheff, he had been forced from the Court by the basest of intrigues and after many years of wandering had received the tonsure. During his Superiorship of Solovetz the monastery grew by leaps and bounds; he built many of the churches and the fame of his sanctity and devotion spread to the uttermost ends of the Empire.

Of all the monarchs who stud the pages of the world's history none appear to have possessed such a pretty touch in deception as Ivan the Terrible!! Pretending to have called to mind an old acquaintance in St. Philip, and that it gave him the sincerest pleasure to honour his saintliness, he summoned him to Moscow and in spite of the old man's prayers and

entreaties installed him as Metropolitan. No one better understood the duties of the office to which he was called, or realised more fully his ultimate fate, than St. Philip. Not to protest against the gross excesses of the Court was, of course, impossible, and remonstrances of any kind had a habit of irritating Ivan and leading him to commit the most horrible atrocities. The following account, taken from Mouravieff's *History of the Russian Church*, gives a vivid description of an interview between Ivan and the prelate. "Once on a Sunday while he was celebrating the Liturgy in the Cathedral of the Assumption, the Czar entered with a crowd of his 'peculiars' dressed in a strange attire and presented himself before the Primate's chair to receive the blessing. But the prelate kept his eyes fixed on the ikon of the Saviour and appeared not to notice the presence of the Sovereign. The boyars announced to him that Ivan was there. 'I do not recognise the Czar,' said he, 'in any such dress. I do not recognise him either in the acts of his Government. What is this that thou hast done, oh Czar, to put off from thee the form of thine honour? Fear the judgments of God. Here we are offering up the Blood in the sacrifice of the Lord, while behind the altar is flowing the innocent blood of Christian men.'

"Ivan boiled over with fury and tried to stop Philip's lips with menaces, but these had no terror for the holy man. 'I am a stranger and a pilgrim upon earth as all my fathers were,' he quietly replied, 'and I am ready to suffer for the truth. Where would be my faith if I kept silence?'"

As can be imagined, with a temperament like

ARCHANGEL. PILGRIMS EMBARKING FOR SOLOVETZKY MONASTERY.

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Ivan's, plain speaking of this nature was sufficient to upset him altogether, and he would undoubtedly have had his Metropolitan there and then murdered, had it not been for some curious vein of apprehension that evil might befall him if he interfered with the holy old man. Hence he avoided him; but a procession happened to bring them together when the Metropolitan, noticing one of Ivan's suite with his head covered, pointed out the offender to the Czar. Meanwhile the man had doffed his hat and charged the Metropolitan with calumny. This seemingly unimportant incident, however, determined Ivan once and for all to get rid of Philip and accordingly a certain Bishop Pafnutii was sent to Solovetz to endeavour to find out something against him. Of the Community only one man turned traitor, induced by flattery and threats. Ivan was overjoyed and cited the Metropolitan as a criminal; a council, packed with Ivan's creatures, found the old man guilty and sentenced him to imprisonment. Philip joyfully laid aside the insignia of his rank and asked nothing better than to be allowed to return to his beloved Solovetz. But that was not at all Ivan's way; he had been publicly reproved and he wanted to have a public revenge. Hence he compelled the Metropolitan once more to perform the Liturgy. Whilst offering up the Holy Sacrifice, a crowd of Ivan's retainers broke into the church and tore the robes from the Saint, leaving nothing upon him but a shirt. On the next day, in the presence of the Czar, the sentence of deposition was read out to him which left him unmoved, though he bravely implored the Czar to remember the example of his ancestors and cease his murders. He was then removed to the Monastery of St. Nicholas

where the Czar, in a fit of savage pleasantry, sent him the bloody head of his nephew as a present. Philip blessed it and returned it to the sender. A week later he was conducted to the Ortoch Monastery at Tyer where he was subsequently martyred. There is one satisfactory incident to relate in this connection, namely, that the Judas of Solovetz who in the first case betrayed his master, was himself, after the death of St. Philip, sentenced by Ivan to perpetual imprisonment.

The transformation of the monastery into a fortress was due to Ivan's son Feodor, partially as a protection against the Swedes, who at that time were very troublesome, and also, partially, no doubt, as some sort of sop for the flagrant misdeeds of his parent. The building of the edifice occupied eight years, the whole covering two and a half acres. Standing on a considerable elevation, it was protected on the west by the sea, and on the east by a large lake, and was considered at that time to be absolutely impregnable. In 1590 the body of St. Philip was brought back to the monastery, afterwards being transferred again to the Usspensky Sobor at Moscow.

Solovetz a little later was to enter upon troublous times. One of its own monks, the famous Nikon, became Patriarch of Moscow and his was the reforming zeal which was responsible for the eradication of many glaring errors from the books of the Liturgy. It is not within the scope of a book such as this to probe deeply into this most momentous question which, in a way, has its resemblances to the so-called Reformation in our own country. But the immediate result of the upheaval was the defection from the Church of a considerable pro-

portion of its adherents who called themselves "old believers," as opposed to the "new doctrines," and these are to be found even to-day. It would appear that Nikon in the days of his retirement at Solovetz had not been a popular favourite on account of his extreme asceticism, and upon his elevation to the Patriarchate he made himself still more unpopular by his extraordinarily rigorous penances for the sin of intemperance which was rampant among the Black clergy, or monks. Be that as it may, Solovetz would have none of Nikon nor of his reforms, and for ten years it continued in rebellion, defying the authority of Czar and Church with the greatest of ease, thanks to the protection of its fortress. It seems doubtful whether the place would ever have been taken had it not been for the good services of an escaped monk who had been a prisoner in the rebel hands and who showed the besiegers a secret entrance.

Needless to say, Peter the Great, or as he might well have been named, Peter the Ubiquitous, visited the island in 1702 with no less than thirteen vessels, and by way of a present to the good monks, handed over to them a large quantity of gunpowder for their protection. From then on till 1854 the monastery continued the even tenour of its way, ever increasing in size, ever augmenting in numbers and day by day becoming more generally known and revered throughout the Russian Empire.

Incidentally, however, in 1790 it was thoroughly examined by engineers and refortified, but in this connection it is only fair to say that in 1814, at the conclusion of the universal peace, the artillery equipment of Solovetz was dispersed amongst

neighbouring shore batteries and all that remained were weapons for signalling purposes.*

It is perhaps quite understandable that no event in the whole history of Solovetz has made more historical impression than its bombardment during the Crimean War by a British naval squadron under Captain Ommaney. As one would expect, there is a wide difference between the bald official statement issued by the Admiralty and the story of the monks themselves. For the following official account I am indebted to the Rev. Alexander A. Boddy, whose excellent work, *With Russian Pilgrims*, has supplied me with much historical detail and whose courtesy in allowing me to use the same I acknowledge gratefully in the Preface.

"*White Sea, 19th June.*—We approached the White Sea with a west wind. The surface of the sea was perfectly smooth, as in a calm, but a fresh breeze aloft. The weather was hazy. The temperature of the sea surface came down to 36½° and 38°; the water was discoloured and covered with the trunks of pine-trees, some of large dimensions, that had been washed off from the banks of the rivers when swollen by the melting of the ice. From the quantity we sailed through at this season I infer that this timber contributes to the supply of drift-wood found on the shores of Spitzbergen. At 1.30 p.m. we made the coast near the Lambuskoi Islands, which by the aid of our excellent charts were easily recognised; they are lower than any part of the mainland.

"We entered the White Sea rapidly with a leading wind. At 3 p.m. we rounded Gorodetski Point, and were abreast of Orloffka at 6 p.m. Between

* Vide *With Russian Pilgrims.*

ISLAND OF SOLOVETZ. THE AUTHOR IN A MONASTIC "TARANTASS."

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these points the coast is steep and bold, and you may run close along the land with confidence, which it is desirable to do in order to avoid the Orloffka shoals. There were no remarkable features in the coast, which is of a uniform height, from 200 to 300 feet, intersected by deep ravines, which were still full of snow. In Gogolina Bay, westward of Orloffka Point, a glacier appeared to protrude itself into the sea. Orloffka Point is a bold promontory. The lighthouse is erected on the summit, the tower apparently 150 feet high. There are some large buildings near it for the lighthouse keepers. We ran close along the coast near the Trek Islands which are very small, and afford no shelter for an anchorage. Here we fell in with vessels, one a Russian schooner, of which we made a prize.

"A fresh gale having set in from the northward, we continued cruising between Cross Island and Orloffka, waiting for the *Brisk*, which ship we had parted with off Vardohuus. Several neutral vessels were passing on to Archangel for cargoes.

"*Dwina, 26th June.*—The squadron carried a leading wind to the bar of the Dwina. The coast presents the same verdant aspect, and becomes very low as you approach the delta of the Dwina; it is quite clean all along. The coast and the soundings are regular, by which you may know your position anywhere in Archangel Bay. Mudiuga lighthouse is visible six leagues off, and comes into sight long before you can see the land, which is extremely low. All the islands forming the delta of the Dwina being only a few feet above the sea, the pine-trees are the first objects seen above the horizon.

"The N.W. gale brought up no less than 400 neutral vessels for Archangel; all rushed into the market to ship their cargoes before a declaration of the blockade. The majority were under the Dutch flag; being of light draft, most of them ran over the bar to the first anchorage off the south extreme of Mudiuga. One brig and some small vessels struck and became wrecks; some native coasting vessels which we seized before the gale filled at their anchors and broke adrift; a good many of the large vessels kept an offing, dodging under storm sails, which is a very judicious plan, as the outset from the Dwina keeps one to windward.

"*Solovetskoi, 17th July.*—I proceeded on a cruise to examine the bay of Onega, with the *Brisk* and *Miranda* screw steamers. We had a fair run across the White Sea, and sighted the tower on Jiginsk the following morning, and then made for the north side of Anzersk. This island has a considerable elevation, thickly covered with wood, which had a most verdant aspect. A large white monastery stands on the highest part of the land, and another in the N.W. corner of the island in a low cove; a reef of rocks on which the sea breaks lies about three miles north of the N.W. extreme.

"We rounded the north extreme of the island of Solovetskoi, and proceeded at slow speed along the west coast, which at this part is low. We had eight to ten fathoms of water. Running two and three miles off, Mount Sukerna (Striking Hill) is a very remarkable object, here rising up in shape of a pyramid; on the summit a large wooden cross is erected. Then Tolskoi Point bore E. by S., the

celebrated monastery of Solovetskoi came in view, which presented an imposing and beautiful appearance, its numerous domes and minarets glittering in the sun. A very massive wall surrounds the pile of buildings, which gives it the character of a fortification.

"Off Tolskoi Point we shoaled to seven fathoms of water, muddy bottom, and anchored to look about, and to decide by which passage we should effect our approach into Solovetskoi Bay. We had no pilot, but by the aid of the excellent charts supplied we took the vessels close into the bay under the monastery. From Tolskoi Point we steered for two small rocks called Topa, just above water, S.W. of Tolskoi five miles. Hauling close round these, steered for the extreme of Zaitski. Nearing this island the water deepens, when you may haul up for Solovetskoi Bay, keeping close to the small group of islands to the southward of the bay. When passed Sennie we hauled into the anchorage, the monastery bearing N.E. We anchored in ten fathoms. Solovetskoi Bay is an excellent and well-sheltered anchorage, with firm holding ground of stiff clay, where a ship may lie in perfect safety; and there is no difficulty in sailing ships getting into it with no other guide than the plan and chart supplied to us. It is the only place of security that I have visited since entering the White Sea; there is room for a large amount of shipping with good anchorage in every part of it.

"Solovetskoi Island is reserved to the exclusive use of the monastery, which is regarded as one of great sanctity in Russia; many pilgrims resort here annually from all parts of the empire. Its

wealth is very considerable; treasure to the amount of £200,000 had been removed to St. Petersburg early in the spring to secure it from capture, and a garrison had been sent here with a battery of guns to defend the place; on good authority we learnt that it is used as a place of banishment for political offenders." (*This has never been the case. Author.*)

"The island was thickly covered with trees; the monastery, as seen from the bay, was very picturesque. The style of architecture had an oriental character: the domes of the churches were covered with bright green tiles, likewise the belfry and minarets, which are surmounted with green crosses; the exteriors of the churches were ornamented with paintings. The whole establishment covers a large space of ground, and looks like a fortified town. There are extensive buildings for the monks who, it is said, number five hundred, and buildings for the pilgrims; the whole is surrounded by circular towers.

"On anchoring, some field artillery guns with a body of troops emerged from the wood lying between the monastery and the beach, and exchanged shots with the *Miranda*, upon which I sent to demand the surrender of all military stores. This was met with a refusal; in consequence the place was bombarded for five hours, and at a long range, it being impossible to approach within 1000 yards, as it is built some distance from the beach.

"The site chosen for the monastery was probably selected, in a military point of view, for protection against assault; on three sides it is surrounded by water. The wall of defence is constructed with

solid masonry, and flanked with circular towers at the angles, in which some pieces of ordnance were mounted, the height of which was apparently fifty feet; the curtains were all loopholed, with a covered way for the protection of the defender. Altogether it is a work of great strength, and could not be assaulted without breaching the walls, which I was not in the position to undertake.

"We endeavoured to advance the *Miranda* into the creek that leads up to the monastery, but found it too intricate for a ship of her dimensions, and only succeeded in getting her abreast of Peci or Rock Island, in effecting which she grounded twice; from this position some shells were thrown into the fort at a range of 1200 yards. Finding that my time and resources were inadequate for the reduction of the place, I proceeded for Onega.

"From Pushlakta we steamed across to Anzersk. At starting we kept near the land, to avoid a dangerous shoal with two fathoms on it. Nearing the extreme cape, steered direct for the monastery on Anzersk; anchored under the island near a projecting point with the church bearing north, in fourteen fathoms stiff clay and shells. The coast is bold, no bottom with hand lead until you are half a mile from the shore; this is a good anchorage for a ship to seek shelter from northerly winds; this island is nigh and covered with trees, and is devoted to the seclusion of the monastery.

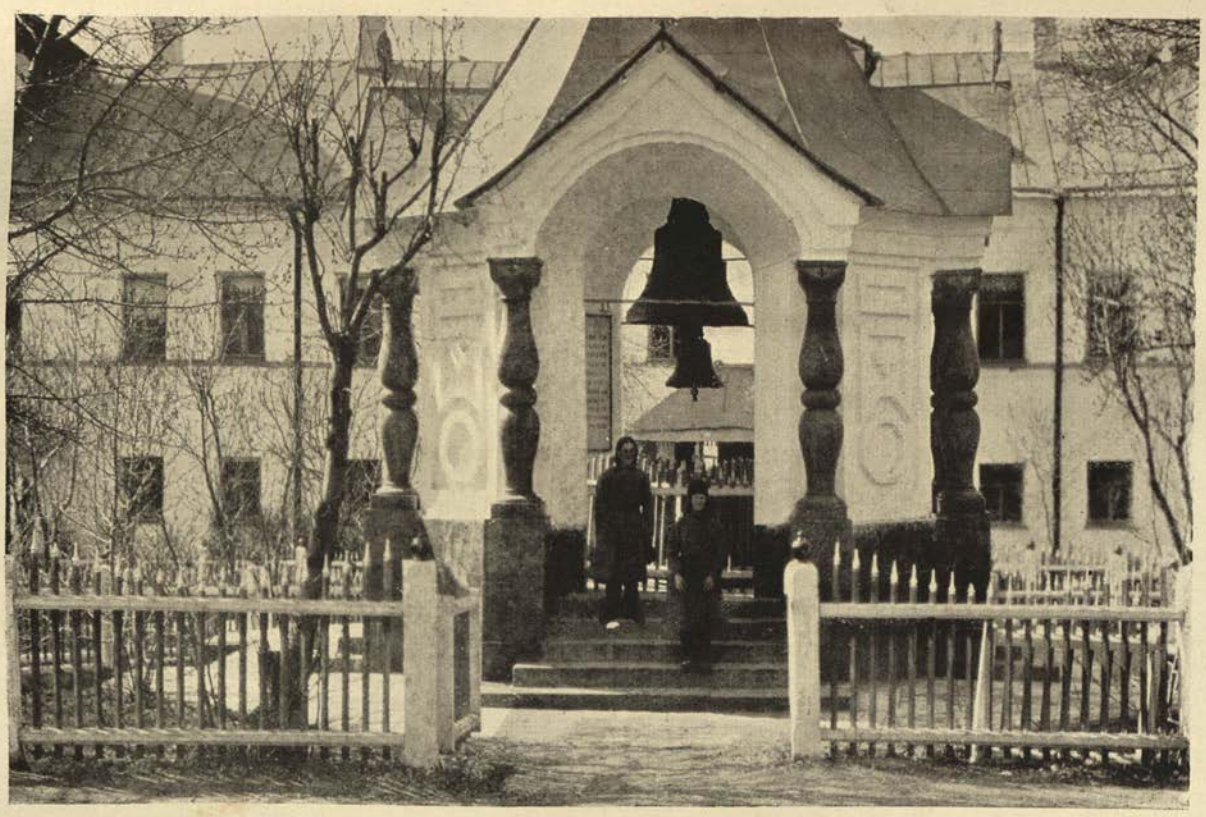
"Leaving the anchorage, we passed to the northward through the passage between Anzersk and Solovetskoi; on the west side of this channel are some rocks and shoals, which were visible; keeping near Anzersk, there is no danger. While at anchor I sent some officers on shore to walk to the

monastery, but finding no road they returned, as the wood was impenetrable ; in the meantime some shots were fired on the boat that was awaiting. It would appear that the Solovetskoi group of islands are exclusively appropriated to the monastic establishment."

No mention is made in this account of a landing which undoubtedly did take place when, by way of a memento, a large bell was removed. Times have changed since then and to-day England and Russia being Allies and the best of friends, it was thought that it would be a timely compliment to send the said bell back to its original owners. This was accordingly done in 1913, when it was handed over with great pomp and ceremony, the British Naval attaché at Petrograd journeying to Archangel for the purpose. But there is a sad sequel. When the good monks received it back safely on the island they found that it fitted in nowhere and that apparently the wrong bell had been returned.

Needless to say, also, the monks' description of the bombardment differs considerably from the cold, prosaic statement which I have been permitted to quote. Thus, according to them, the British squadron was in reality vanquished and the Blessed Virgin or, as they call Her, the Holy Mother of God, received Herself the final shot ; the ikon which was then struck being preserved in its wrecked condition ever since.

With this concludes the general history of this great monastic fortress with the exception of the preparations made by the monks against any possible interference on the part of German warships during the present war. They took the precaution to send to the mainland all their archives,



ISLAND OF SOLOVETZ. THE BELL TAKEN BY THE BRITISH DURING CRIMEAN WAR AND RETURNED 1913.
Incidentally it will go into no belfry, giving rise to the belief that the wrong bell has been returned.

To face p. 54.

as well as the contents of the Treasury, and it remains to be seen whether in 1915 they will be able as usual to welcome their pilgrims. With our recollections of Solovetz, we cordially hope that there will be no interruption, and that the weary toiler from far-off Russia will not be deprived of what, to him, is a precious privilege.

CHAPTER IV

SOLOVETZ TO-DAY

PILGRIMS to Solovetz have the choice of two routes, they can either travel by the steamships belonging to the monastery itself, of which more anon, or they can travel by the excellent vessels of the Murman Steamship Company, which, unlike their ecclesiastical competitors, run at stated intervals and keep good time.

Hence, one stormy afternoon towards the end of May, we boarded the *Keret*, which vessel was advertised to arrive at Solovetz early the following morning. Our fellow-passengers included the head of the Detective Force of Archangel province and his wife, both of whom very thoughtfully and with much tact pre-empted the ladies' cabin, quite irrespective of the rights and needs of other passengers.

As soon as we got away from the estuary of the Dwina we had a sample of what White Sea weather can be. Our ship's cargo was bricks, which made her "tender," but I think she would have rolled in the Suez Canal. Unfortunately a strong breeze sprang up from the north-east, developing into a gale, catching us direct upon the beam as we headed for the islands. It proved a horrible night. Mountainous seas swept the ship from stem to stern and it was practically impossible to stand. One by one the marble-topped tables in the smoking-room broke adrift, one crashing down the companion-way,

ISLAND OF SOLOVETZ. VIEW FROM MONASTERY LIGHTHOUSE.

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knocking the stewardess silly en route. It was also bitterly cold. . . . But, as is the way in the White Sea, the storm died down as quickly as it came, and at eight o'clock in the morning we steamed round a pine-crowned headland into Solovetz roads.

It was an enchanting picture! Almost fairylike looked the huge outline of the monastery with its numberless cupolas of green, blue and gold, its bastions and turrets and the frowning significance of its embrasures. Girdled on every side with rocky, pine-covered hills from which the snow had as yet not gone, it was surmounted over all by a cold blue sky wherein circled enormous white seagulls screaming raucously as though in welcome. The whole scene seemed fantastic, unreal, the creation perhaps of some poet's or painter's imagination, but assuredly not a hard commonplace of the twentieth century.

We looked forward to our landing with some slight trepidation since ladies are scarce at Solovetz, and it was just possible that the reception to be accorded to my wife might not be too cordial. However, our baggage was dumped into a gig and we were swiftly paddled ashore, the sharp air of the morning giving us tremendous appetites. As we approached we could see two or three monks standing on the jetty together with some fifty or sixty youths, also in monkish garb, and obviously the volunteer labourers of whom we had heard so much. These lads, who are generally young, are sent hither by their parents from all portions of the Russian Empire, in order that, in return for some blessing which has been miraculously vouchsafed, they may, by working voluntarily for a year, show their devotion and thankfulness to Providence.

Their dress is almost the same as that of the monks; a round peaked hat, a voluminous loose stuff coat with wide skirts fastened round the waist with a thick leather girdle, and sea boots. Their hair also remains unclipped after the Russian ecclesiastical style, which sees in the unshorn locks a certain symbolism of the Saviour.

We were kindly greeted on landing by a monk who proved to have charge of the hostel where well-to-do visitors stay, and who quickly set our fears at rest. We were early in the year, he vouchsafed, and the first English who had been there for some considerable time, but for the rest he expressed no surprise, and, marvellous to relate, asked no questions. In a businesslike fashion he showed us at once to our apartments, telling us at the same time that dinner in the refectory would be at eleven and supper at five, and that meantime he would send us the inevitable samovar.

Our quarters were constructed in a peculiar way. From the outside door one passed into what must have been at one time one big room, but which had been partitioned off, thus forming three separate rooms, which I suspect, in the event of a crush, were meant to be occupied by three separate parties. Such a proceeding would, however, be distinctly inconvenient, since there were no doors and since each room led into the other. Also I must remark that knocking at the outside door to announce entry was apparently regarded as quite unnecessary, causing us on more than one occasion some considerable embarrassment. The furniture was the same in all the suites, and consisted of a table, two chairs and a narrow, springless settee which served as a bed. The washing arrangements were primi-

SOLOVETZKY MONASTERY. FRONT VIEW FROM GUEST-HOUSE.

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tive, hot water, of course, an unknown luxury, while a single tap over an uncomfortably small basin in the lavatory was supposed to be quite sufficient for the needs of all the monastic visitors. Lighting arrangements were conspicuous by their absence, since during the pilgrim season there is practically perpetual daylight, but there was a stove situated between every two sets of rooms which was kept burning both day and night and thus ensured a comfortable temperature. Happily, we travelled, as already stated, with both a collapsible bath and washstand, as well as with a camp bed, so that we were able, after having stowed our belongings away, to make ourselves quite at home.

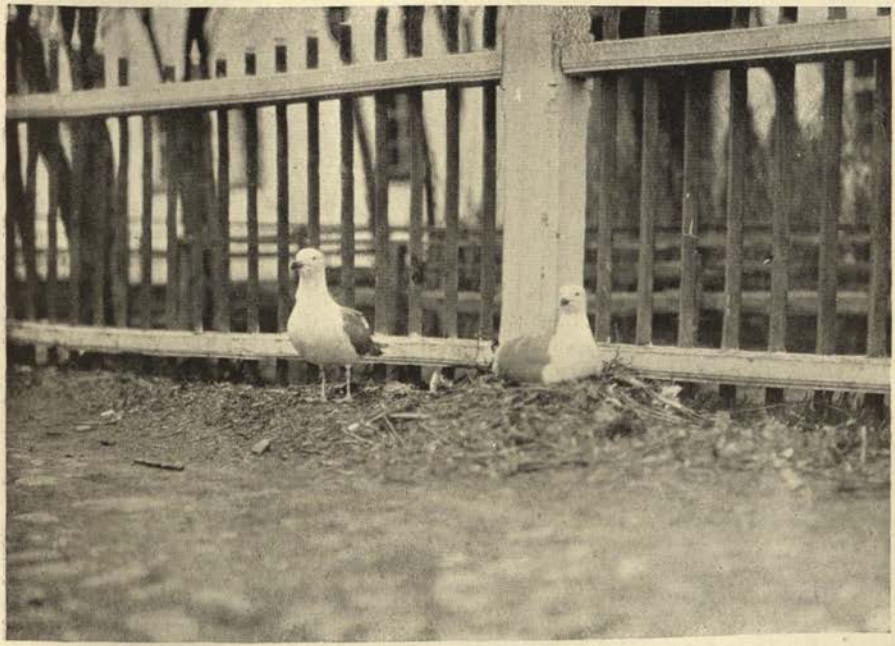
The next necessary operation was to purchase the day's supply of bread—white bread, be it said, and quite the best we ever tasted in Russia. Each loaf is stamped with the double cross, showing that this monastery, though not a Lavra (i.e. a monastery ruled over by a Metropolitan, of which there are only three in Russia, the Pechersk at Kief, the Troitsky near Moscow, and the Alexander Nevsky at Petrograd), yet has the right to deal direct with the Holy Synod in all ecclesiastical matters, and practically possesses all the privileges rightly belonging to a Lavra. This bread is the "pain bénit" for the pilgrims, but we found it a most excellent stand-by, in fact, as events proved, a stand-by of the very deepest importance.

Our first meal at the monastery will ever linger in my memory. To begin with we were very hungry, also we chanced to be rather late. Knowing nothing of the etiquette surrounding meals in Russian monastic establishments, and feeling, moreover, uncomfortably conscious that we looked rather

aggressively English, and that our presence would be likely to cause something of a sensation, the minute or two before we plunged into the refectory were moments of real agony. And then to crown it all we discovered that we had come in the back way, via the kitchen. Hastily passing through it, we found ourselves in a sort of pantry where some fifty youngsters were having a noisy meal, every now and then at a certain signal getting up *en masse*, and clearing away the plates of the monks who were eating in the refectory proper. Seeing no particular preparation for us we made a move onwards, and, as I expected, our entry into the refectory was greeted with a sort of gasping hush. A very old monk hastily hobbled up to me and said that on no account could a woman be admitted into these sacred precincts, and that, while I was welcome to sit at the table with them, there was a nice table in the pantry for my wife. To the pantry we both accordingly retired, preferring most distinctly not to be separated, and our hopes of something to eat rose high.

We were each provided with a large, rather greasy-looking pewter soup plate, a wooden spoon, and a thick slab of sour damp black bread. The first dish on the menu was a sort of fish broth made without stock and with the corpses of a number of little fish, which looked like small perch, floating in it. This, in spite of our pangs of hunger, we voted not a great success. Then followed a dish of "tresca," dried salted cod, cold and mixed with potato. That, also, we were obliged to pass. Next we were liberally helped to "kasha" (porridge), in the middle of which was a pool of what in a weak moment we took to be honey or treacle. Fearlessly

ISLAND OF SOLOVETZ. THE CHIEF GUEST HOUSE OF MONASTERY IN WHICH WE STAYED.



ISLAND OF SOLOVETZ. THE FAMOUS SEA-GULLS. A BIRD NESTING IN A QUADRANGLE.

Notice its mate eyeing the photographer with earnest suspicion.

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we loaded our spoons, only one spoon is allowed for the entire meal, and took a good heaping mouthful. Alas! the kasha was cold, and the supposed honey, linseed oil!

And we were also thirsty, but it was only sheer desperation which drove us to drink of the kvass (a non-intoxicating liquor made from fermented black bread), which was bitter and unpalatable, and which was drunk by everyone in turn out of the same ladle. They say that familiarity breeds contempt, but it is only the truth to state that familiarity with the food of Solovetz served merely to increase our repugnance to the regular Solovetz diet, and it was only due to the kindness of an old monk who used to cook fish specially for us that we succeeded in not going absolutely hungry.

One other great drawback we also found to be the scarcity of drinking water which always occurs here during the first month or two of the season. With the melting of the snow the brooks and runnels are, naturally, full to overflowing, but the water is tainted by decomposed vegetable matter and becomes unwholesome if not actually dangerous to health. We tried the effect of our powerful Doulton filter, but it refused to work, the "candles" almost immediately becoming coated with brown slime. Yet, withal, the monks are fine, sturdy-bodied men and, in spite of the distressing sameness of their diet, possess extraordinarily hearty appetites and certainly suffer from no lack of food, judging from their appearances.

At the conclusion of the dinner in the main refectory, at a given signal, the choir boys enter and a long grace is chanted in front of an altar

which occupies one side of the low vaulted hall, the walls of which are smothered with frescoes.

The population of this extraordinary community consists of about four hundred monks and six or seven hundred volunteer workers, while it is estimated that probably fifty thousand pilgrims pass through during the season. And it is an extraordinary community in more senses than one. Jealous of their perpetual possession, the monks have organised their brotherhood without any civic aid whatever. For the use of the Archimandrite and of the brethren, during the long winter, it was thought that the electric light would be convenient. Two monks were despatched to the works of Siemens in Petrograd, who went through a thorough course of electricity, practical and applied. The installation was then erected under the supervision of these skilled artisans, who in turn have taught their craft to others.

For a long time the monks have had their own steamers plying to Archangel, manned by monk sailors with engineer and stoker monks and even a monkish captain. One of these boats, the *Vera*, was engined from England, and, "on dit," that on the arrival of the machinery it was found that the engines were too big for the boat. Not in the least "boule-versés," the monks themselves widened the vessel, fitted the engines, and she is running to-day.

They have constructed their own dry-dock; there is a boiler shop and a smithy; there is an up-to-date timber mill; and they are about to erect a powerful wireless station, though there is already cable communication with the coast. But there are no passports; no one visiting the island need ever give their names, there are no Customs

ISLAND OF SOLOVETZ. ENTRANCE TO MONASTERY, AND VOLUNTARY LABOURERS.

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officers, there are no police and there are supposed to be no cigarettes and no vodka. Under certain circumstances one can imagine it being an ideal place for an absconding bank manager or a defaulting stock-broker in which to hide himself. But, unfortunately, the good monks nominally limit their hospitality to three days and have a disagreeable habit of actively speeding the parting guest. There are three huge rest-houses for the use of pilgrims, a hospital complete with monk-doctors, the latest surgical apparatus and a dentist who, however, does not appear to trouble much about his own brethren.

One cannot help suspecting that, from being a very pious foundation of a most ascetic type where the aims of its inmates were intrinsically a desire to live apart from the wickedness of the great world, there has been a gentle deterioration, and many of the monks resident there to-day are attracted by visions of a quiet life and an extremely easy one. Also, one cannot help fancying that the good pilgrim from afar is welcomed as much for his roubles and kopecks as for his sanctity and devotion to the Orthodox Church, and is to some degree exploited. In this connection there is a most excellent story told, and no harm can come from its narration.

Things had not been going very well financially at the monastery, and the pilgrims that particular year did not appear to have spent as much money as usual. Hence drastic measures were to be taken to refill the depleted treasury. Now it so happened that the monkish steamer, *Solovetz*, ran into just such a nor'-easter as I have described on her way back from the monastery to the mainland. The captain saw his opportunity. He sent down his

mate to the pilgrims with a message that he had no doubt that the Almighty was seriously annoyed at something, and that he thought it must have to do with the money given by those unable to make the pilgrimage to their more fortunate friends, the said money being designated for the purchase of ikons and other votive offerings. That the money had been spent properly or indeed at all, he gravely doubted. He quite understood the human weakness which had led to the committal of such a sin, and in order to make an opportunity of atonement he would send the cap round. This he did, with comparatively gratifying results, but it was not enough for the wily old Father. He was no bad seaman, and he knew the capabilities of his boat, so with no more ado he put her broadside on, and she took several beautiful seas right over her. The pilgrims were now genuinely terrified, most of them never having been at sea before in their lives, and besought the captain to intercede for them. He replied that he was afraid some of them still had guilty money in their pockets, and round went the cap again. This time he had a bumper collection, and, bringing his ship head to, he comfortably rode out the storm.

Of course there are numberless yarns anent Solovetz, but another one related to me in Archangel shows that the good monks are very human.

A lady leaving the monastery asked a monk what he would like for a present and was somewhat surprised when he answered, "A samovar," since during the winter months the monks make these articles themselves. However, she despatched a large and handsome one and next time she saw the recipient asked him how he liked it. "It was very

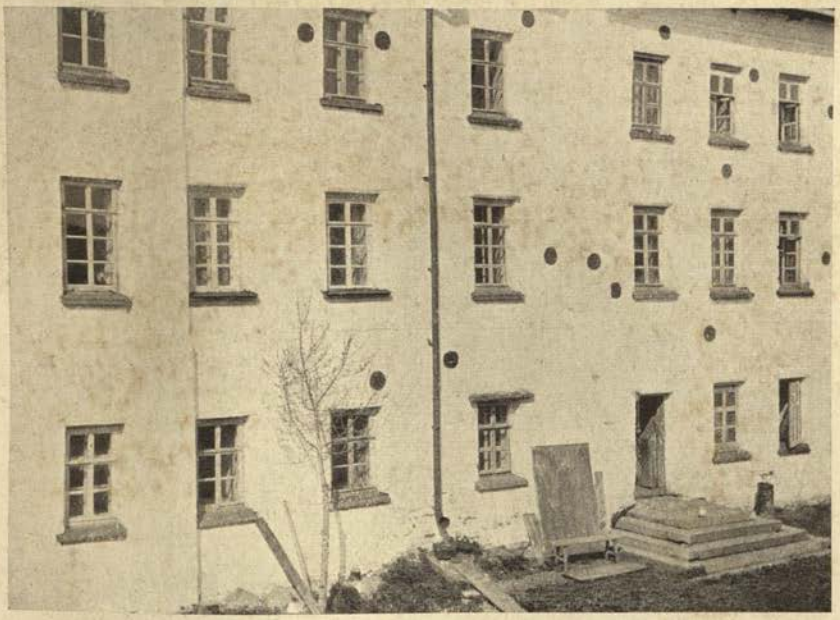
kind of you," said he, " but you did not quite catch my meaning. As you know we are not allowed to have vodka, and it seemed to me such a very convenient way of getting a bottle through. However, it cannot be helped, but another time you will know."

No account of Solovetz, however brief, would be complete without some mention of the enormous seagulls which haunt the monastery and are treated more or less as sacred birds. They grow to a size never seen elsewhere, and from beak to tail must measure quite twenty-four inches, and weigh at least fifteen pounds. They are wonderfully tame, enormously strong and inclined to be vicious, especially during nesting-time. Whilst taking a photograph of one, the curiosity of some of the voluntary workers was aroused and they edged in closer and closer until the cock bird apparently thought they were coming too near to his hen. With a squawk of rage he went straight to the nearest of them, and with one tweak of his bill bit right through the stout leather of the lad's top boot. Then he came back and watched my operations closely, and being satisfied that I meant no harm, permitted me to take an excellent picture of " Madame." About these birds there are many legends. Not the least interesting is that during the attack by Captain Ommaney and his squadron, they came forth in their thousands and pecked at the eyes of the gunners, thus putting them off their aim, whilst another version says that there were so many thousands of them that they completely hid the island with their wings, by this means preventing the English from doing any harm. It is not, however, to these birds, as might readily be

imagined, that the island owes its name but to the nightingale, which is reputed to sing here with an especial sweetness during the long, romantic, pine-scented " white nights."

The British bombardment of Solovetz must really have proved something of a blessing in disguise. Vulgarly speaking, it was an excellent advertisement and the monks have not been slow to recognise that fact. Obviously it was necessary to repair the damage done by the shell-fire, but where possible the mark has been perpetuated by a large circle of black paint. On the western side of the monastery so frequent are these reminiscences of the past that they remind one of the plums in a pudding. But that there is no animosity against this little intrusion of England upon the peace of Solovetz may be gleaned from the fact that one evening, whilst wandering round the outskirts of the timber mill, we came upon a monk, ancient and venerable in appearance, but most cheery in his mien. " Oh, you are the English people, are you ? " was his greeting. We were obliged to assent to the gentle implication, and I ventured to say that I supposed he was sorry ever to see Englishmen on the island, considering the damage they had wrought in bygone days. The old gentleman chuckled, put his arm round my shoulder and gave me a squeeze. " No, no," he answered, " you are the best advertisement we have ever had during our long existence. You have no idea of the number of people who come to see your shotmarks. And after all you didn't do much harm, did you ? "

Upon Russian ecclesiastical art it would be very easy to write a chapter. Except in rare cases it must be admitted it is apt to be crude and unlifelike.



WHITE SEA. ISLAND OF SOLOVETZ. MONASTERY WALL, SHOWING BRITISH SHOT-MARKS.

The monks are very proud of their bombardment, and commemorate "hits" in manner shown.

WHITE SEA. ISLAND OF SOLOVETZ. MONASTIC CEMETERY.

In foreground note coffin, which remains above ground till weather permits of normal burial.

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There are, of course, those exceptional symphonies of feeling which appeal to the heart with the same tragic touch as a chord of harmony. But on the whole, in the out-of-the-way and more or less untrodden portions of Northern Russia, the art of the painter has been used chiefly to depict, in somewhat grotesque fashion, the final downfall of the sinner.

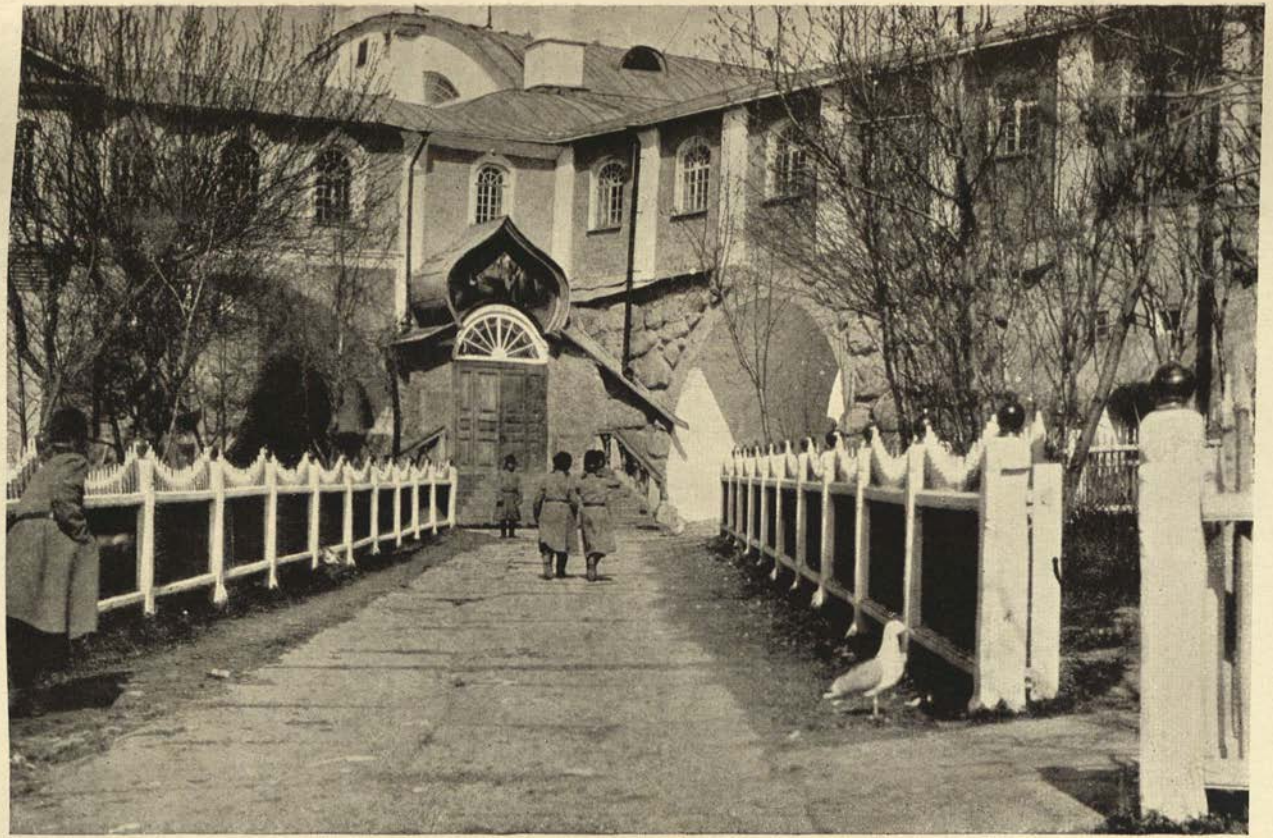
There is a long cloister at Solovetz which I shall never forget. The frescoes therein are supposed to be illustrative of the various sins to which we are all prone and their inevitable punishment. For crude horror I have only once seen their equal, and that is in the Campo Santo at Pisa. But for sheer richness of detail I shall always remember two frescoes of a very modern type which adorned the walls of the Cathedral of the Transfiguration and which fascinated me and held me spellbound for quite a length of time. In the first the artist has portrayed what he took to be a modern man of the world. The gentleman is represented in a frock-coat, spotted tie of most extravagant hue, large check trousers, spats and patent-leather boots, kneeling and making his confession to an angelic-looking priest. In the background is the devil, who is evidently using means more painful than promising, as evidenced by a trident liberally applied to the fleshy portions of the penitent's anatomy, whilst an angel in the far background covers her eyes and appears to be weeping. The second picture shows the devil very evidently nonplussed. The angel in the background has uncovered her eyes and is smiling approbation, whilst the gentleman is vomiting forth in quick succession a large number of snakes, which have been realistically depicted and which seem to bear

a close relationship to those sold for a penny each in Ludgate Circus.

Frankly, the ikons and ecclesiastical art generally at Solovetz are disappointing. In many another town in Northern Russia there are better examples, and the atmosphere appeared to be rather one of sacrosanct apathy, which in itself is sufficient to discourage any artistic creative effort. Certainly the specimens in a little town like Veliki Ustjug display far greater realisation of the value of art, are never tawdry, and adapt themselves, at any rate from a Western European point of view, far more completely to the imagination than those at Solovetz can ever hope to do.

Of the most disappointing things in this connection I might mention the library, an inconspicuous, uninteresting room, wherein is preserved, as far as I could understand, only a single autograph of the Metropolitan Nikon. I expressed surprise at this, and was informed that all the most valuable relics had been removed to the Kazan Theological College—wherefore, I know not. There is also an armoury of which the monks are proud, consisting chiefly of old smooth-bore cannon, presumably dating back to the days of Peter the Great, and piles of English round shot—relics of the bombardment. Viewed in the light of the twentieth century one is inclined to feel that this old-world, isolated monastery rather lives upon its glories of the past, and is not averse to using them as a means of present profit.

Solovetz is an island of surprises. Desiring to see something of it we chartered a tarantass, a four-wheeled vehicle drawn by two or three horses as may be necessary, in order to visit a point



ISLAND OF SOLOVETZ. A QUADRANGLE.

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some nine miles away, which in the Russian language is called the Striking Point. Actually, it is a high headland, in point of fact the highest in the island, whereon is situated a church and small monastery. The road thither is quite excellent as regards quality, and in this connection I must pay a compliment to the monks of Solovetz, their roads are always excellent. It winds in and out amongst pine forests, birch trees and great expanses of lake—Solovetz is full of lakes, hence the ample fish supply—and its scenery is not dissimilar to that of Northern Scotland.

Our driver was one of the voluntary workers, Constantine by name, a native of Olonetz Government. Once he realised that we were really interested in him, he quickly thawed and became our firm friend. The church at the top of the Striking Point has been well placed. Standing some thousand feet above sea-level, it dominates the island and the adjacent sea for miles. On a clear day one can see the Korelean coast and trace the rugged shore towards the mouth of the Dwina. It is lonely here; very lonely, very remote, and, needless to say, in winter very cold. But the monks, ever mindful of their responsibilities, have installed at the top of their church a first-class lighthouse which, on stormy nights and dark, must prove a veritable "Star of the Sea" for the safety of ships and sailors struggling homewards over the storm-swept expanse of the White Sea. The lighthouse keepers are monks, and somehow there seems to me to be a peculiar fitness in their utilisation for this particular purpose. They profess to be, and certainly are to the Orthodox Russian, beacons of salvation in the weary struggle

of life where many a soul is lost almost from sheer fatigue of spirit. And when the friendly beams of this great ten thousand candle power lamp shine over the never quiescent waters, surely their message must be almost allegorical.

And what a life! The Catholic Church in its Trappist communities has attempted to symbolise the negation of the individual ego; practically every natural desire is rendered nugatory and life becomes an existence dependent upon a certain number of daily applied acts and facts. But in these wild northern wastes, this elemental idea is rendered a thousand times additionally more difficult. There is the loneliness, the darkness in winter, the incessant monotony, the lack of expansion, the eternal knowledge that to-morrow spells but to-day. No, these monks of Solovetz are, considered from that point of view, not far removed from the heroic. They can no longer be standard-bearers of a fresh assault of Christianity upon the strongholds of unbelief. But they are, as far as an outsider can tell, satisfied to suffer, to endure and to await the coming of that long-promised Saviour Who is the birthright of the poorest Russian moujik from Archangel to Astrakan and from Petrograd to Vladivostock.

Of our friend Constantine I have many, many memories. His presence at Solovetz was caused by the very severe illness of his little brother. His mother had gladly given the lad for a year as a token of her debt to Providence for her younger son's recovery. He had quite one of the most lovable natures I have ever met, and with him his religion was an active and not a passive force. Thus, I was rather amused and not a little touched

WHITE SEA. ISLAND OF SOLOVETZ. CONSTANTINA TYPICAL VOLUNTEER LABOURER. VASSILIEVITCH STOLYAROF.

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to find that he spent an odd rouble I gave him in buying an ikon, one of the gaudily painted wooden ones specially prepared for the purpose, which he laid upon the tomb of St. Zosima, after much consideration upon how best to display it.

Constantine was our guide, companion and friend on several of our short excursions, but that in which he took the supremest pleasure was a walk through the woods to the little church of St. Philip. The legend is that here the holy old man of that name was privileged to see our Saviour. He appeared to him, and showing him His wounds, told him that eventually he also must suffer for his faith. Thereupon St. Philip built a small hut on the spot and lived there, a church being subsequently erected near by in memory of the occasion. The church is chiefly remarkable for a statue of Our Lord, rather over life-size, seated in a chair and displaying His five wounds, while upon His forehead is the crown of thorns deeply driven into the flesh causing driblets of blood. In Russia, statues of this nature are extremely uncommon, and it may be due to poor artistic talent that the result as depicted here is hopelessly incongruous, not in the least reverential, and tending rather towards the revolting. But the eyes of Constantine saw nothing of all that. Pictured in the lad's brain was merely the great tragedy of the Crucifixion, and what it meant intimately to him, his faith in Divine love and pity.

And hence it was that our surprise was great at his attitude towards the monks. It seemed incredible that one so uneducated and, in addition, so young could already distinguish between things as they ought to be, and things as unfortunately they probably are. Thus for the monks he professed no

great admiration, and thereby we were greatly impressed. "Oh," said he, "they like their vodka and they have their smoke when they want to, but it's a hard time for us youngsters." We naturally asked whether there was ever active dissatisfaction amongst these lads, and whether they ever left the island without permission. Constantine was emphatic. "We get no pay," he said, "and my mother cannot afford the fare to Archangel, so I must wait until my time is up. The monks are not so bad, and they never beat us. But you see we can't get away and so there's an end to it." Constantine was an endearing creature. In many ways he was like an entirely affectionate dog. Once he realised that we had adopted him temporarily he followed us everywhere, and literally slept on the doormat in order to be near us. His aims and ambitions in life were also typical; often used we to say, "Constantine, what are you going to do by-and-by?" And his answer was always, "I think I would like to have a little shop, and I have heard that there is a country far away where one can make much money, they call it America. Perhaps I might go there." I must add that this little lad was one of the most clean, healthy and happy persons it would be possible to meet.

And then there was Nicolai! Nicolai must have been about ten years of age and was employed as servant in our Rest-house. He was a fat, red-faced, cherubic little lad with a most terrible penchant for cigarettes which, as I have before remarked, are forbidden. Without any warning he would poke his naughty little head through the door and murmur, "Yestli-oovas papirosi?" (Have you any cigarettes?) And upon receiving a few he would

MONASTERY LIGHTHOUSE, SOLOVETZ ISLAND.
The light is worked from the top of the church, situated on highest point of the island.

SOLOVETZ ISLAND. MONKS AND LIGHTHOUSE KEEPERS.
The monks maintain and work the lighthouse at their own expense.

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cover my wife's hands with kisses. Of course he was caught, and I remember the good-natured monk in charge giving him a severe talking-to and telling him in unequivocal terms that little boys who smoked always went to hell. Not that Nicolai was either depressed or discouraged. His face grew more cherubic and even redder, and I used to fancy that I could discern the shadow of a twinkle, or was it a wink, as we walked down to the front door.

Solovetz grows upon one; at first its absolute limitations may seem to cripple and confine, but gradually the romance of the solitude and the surroundings eat their way into even the most material of natures. The evenings are usually so still, no breeze whispers through the trees, the waters of the harbour are unruffled by even a passing wind, and a solemn silence seems to envelop the monastery—a silence which can almost be felt. There was one walk we often took past the main façade of the whilom fortress, over the bridge of the little dry dock and up a gentle rise to the cemetery—a cemetery fit for thought this. As yet the ground was too hard for the proper interment of those who had passed on, and at intervals one could see a rude coffin still above ground containing all that was earthly of some Solovetz inhabitant. Grim reminder of the shortness of life and of the mutability of earthly affairs. But there was a rare charm in the quietness of this remote God's acre. Everywhere was rest. Labour was hushed; a cold, greenish-blue light hovered over all; the waters of the harbour were almost unnatural in their stillness. No sound broke the silence. The world was asleep. And so we pondered and wondered and dreamed. There are moments when the veil seems to be lifted from the

eternal, and one can look into the misty, semi-realities of the future. Solovetz offers such moments in plenty.

I have before said that the good monks are no bad hands at speeding the parting guest, and so they proved to be in our case. It was very uncertain at what hour the steamer would arrive which should take us on towards the harbour of Kem. But that did not in the least disturb our monastic mentors. "After all," they said, "what does time matter? You have a most beautiful light both day and night, and we do not suppose that it will take you more than ten minutes to get up, pack and dress."

So much do they know, alas, of the intricacies of a lady's toilet, of the packing of a large and heavy canvas bag containing a complete set of "Compactum furniture," and of the necessary time spent over such commonplace functions as lacing one's shoes. Be that as it may, we were ready for the call and, remarkable to relate, somehow managed to collect our gear and have it ready for transport when the steamer was signalled —to be precise—at the unearthly hour of 4.30 in the morning. We were very tired, very cross and very sleepy, but I must emphasise one fact, we did not appear either to have inconvenienced or wearied our kind hosts, since the Archimandrite was good enough to send us a special message saying that the hospitality of the island was ours for just so long as we chose to make use of it. But our time was limited, and partings in this world are concomitant with progress. We had a bare twenty minutes in which to put things together, and how we managed it I know not.

Outside, so it seemed to us, were the same monks

ISLAND OF SOLOVETZ. "A SWEEPING PARTY."

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dreamily watching the messenger from afar, the steamer, and the same half-hundred voluntary workers leaning upon their elbows gazing into space at nothing. Constantine was there and Nicolai was there. The latter very important and carrying our bags which threatened momentarily to overwhelm him. Of Constantine, even after the space of many months, I find it hard to speak in cold print. He tried to avoid us, and he did this not because he did not wish to say good-bye to good friends, but honestly and truthfully because he did not wish to be embarrassed by anything in the nature of a tip. Of course we corralled him and presented him with a little remembrance. Never have I seen such a look of wistful pathos as when rather shamefacedly he came down to the quayside. Funny little lad! He kissed my wife's hand, murmured, "May the true God bless you," and then hustled away, lest his feelings might betray him. We often think of Constantine and may his be the brightest of futures.

Our boat was hopelessly overcrowded, more pilgrims and still more pilgrims tumbled, literally tumbled, into it, until the gunwale could not have been half an inch above the water. In any other country and under similar circumstances there would have been protests. But nobody here minded. "God be with you, Martha Ivanova," shouted a pilgrim from the shore. "And with you, Pietr Ivanich," was the shrill response from a crinkly-faced old dame. And so we pushed off.

Of course the boat was hopelessly overloaded; of course it was quite impossible for the sailors to row; of course we ran upon a rock, and of course, legitimately, we ought all to have been drowned.

But there was no panic—there never is in Russia. Everybody smiled good-naturedly, chaffed the sailors and munched at their holy bread. They were also much too friendly to show annoying curiosity to obvious foreigners, but when we reached the ship's side, they were not above displaying that innate courtesy the Russian always preserves for those who are strangers. And we left the boat first!

Solovetz is a long journey and it is improbable that during our life's sojourn we shall ever again visit it; but our memories of it are happy ones, and we are glad we made the pilgrimage.

CHAPTER V

GLIMPSES OF THE WHITE SEA LITTORAL

THERE is something about the White Sea which appeals to the imagination, possibly because, comparatively, it is unknown, and in the unknown lies charm. Its brothers, the Red Sea, the Yellow Sea and the Black Sea, are furrowed by the nations of the world, but the White Sea remains remote, austere and forbidding. For the major portion of the year it is inaccessible and even during the summer the cruellest gales render navigation difficult and dangerous. And hence it is that the White Sea littoral is also almost a *terra incognita* and its presumptive savagery has not encouraged the cult of the tourist. Yet, as we found, it has much to offer: wonderful scenery, quaint customs and quite the prettiest girls throughout the length and breadth of the Russian Empire.

I must here point out that the advance of Russian civilisation, in common with the advance of civilisation elsewhere, is slowly but surely eating away the original primitive inhabitants. Thus, on the White Sea the Samoyede has almost disappeared; he has betaken himself to the lonely wastes of Novo Zemyla, or to the vastnesses of the frozen tundra lying between Archangel and Siberia. To-day, according to Professor Mavor, he numbers only two thousand! Similarly, the Korelians who

populate the western shores of the White Sea are also slowly dying away before the Russian advance. It is not that they are being ruthlessly exterminated, but simply that they are being gradually eradicated by that law of the survival of the fittest, that same law which is responsible for the depopulation of the Red Indians and the constant decrease in numbers of the Maories, or they are being absorbed to the point of loss of their national characteristics. Thus the Korelians are a branch of the great Finnish family, but whereas those of the race living in Finland are Lutheran, the White Sea Korelians are severely Orthodox and are being rapidly Russianised.* And in these latitudes it must also be remembered that there are climatic limitations to much progression northwards.

Here also are the Pomors, or literally, those who dwell upon the sea-coast, who are intrinsically Russian and who probably are the remnants of those early pioneers who attached themselves to the monastic adventurers of whom I have spoken. But they have grown up to be a class apart and they are to a man "Old Believers"—i.e. they have never accepted the reforms of the Patriarch Nikon. They are fishermen, pure and simple, and not even the best wages in the world would induce them to take up agriculture.

Finally, there are to be found quite a number of Zirians, a fine sturdy race who chiefly inhabit the watershed of the rivers Vichegda, Kama and Petchora, who are called the Jews of the North and who are supposed to be the descendants of Finnish tribes who occupied all this portion of the world long before Slav expansion and when the expression "Russia" merely referred to a small area

* Mavor, *Economic History of Russia.*

WHITE SEA. KANDALAKSHA HOUSEWIFE.

KORELIAN WOMEN FROM THE "BLACK RIVER."

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of land in the neighbourhood of Kief. These are a thoroughly go-ahead people when not vodka-spoilt; they are nominally Orthodox and have been so for centuries. Latterly they have awoke with a vengeance to the benefits of education. Quite recently a Zirian student at Petrograd University published a profound philosophical work which was most favourably reviewed by all competent critics.

Hence, in this comparatively small area of Northern Russia, we find at least four separate and distinct peoples and this is characteristic of what the Russian Empire spells. One is so apt to forget that the generic term "Russia" includes more different peoples and separate races than even the British Empire.

We were lucky in our choice of steamers from Solovetz. The *Olga* was one of the latest additions to the Murman Steamship Company and, besides being an excellent sea-boat, she proved most comfortable. But she certainly was full! The breaking up of the ice and the opening of the season always witnesses the return of a vast number of officials and merchants. Therefore, upon our arrival on board, we were not greatly disconcerted at being told that there were no cabins, probably for a day or two, and that we must manage as best we could. The obvious thing appeared to be to commandeer the most likely resting-place and we promptly took the smoking-room. Here we installed ourselves and for forty-eight hours lived, moved and had our being. And in this connection I must place it on record that the proverbial Russian courtesy was not wanting. Several heads were thrust into the room to be immediately withdrawn with muttered

apologies and no one attempted to dispute our occupation, in spite of the fact that there was no other place for smokers to go and that we must have been the source of great inconvenience.

At our first port, Kem, this uncomfortable congestion was somewhat relieved. Many of the passengers landed. This disembarkation was amusing to watch, the landing being made in small boats into which people swarmed pell-mell, together with their baggage, each one apparently being determined to be first. The marvel appeared to be that no one was lost overboard. It was obvious that we caused the keenest of interest, one moujik going so far as to bring up his two little girls to listen to our conversation.

The town of Kem lies at some distance upstream and it is rumoured that it is to be connected by railway with the town of Petrozavodsk, the capital of Olonetz province, though quite why this is to be done is not clear. Firstly, Petrozavodsk itself is not connected with any existing line of railway, neither is it on the main road to anywhere in particular. But the Russian Government is inclined to be curiously haphazard in its railway exploitation and new construction is often subordinated to purely private considerations. Not the least interesting sidelight of the present great war has been the critical stocktaking which Russia has been compelled to take of the neglected northern provinces. The outbreak of hostilities found her in a very uncomfortable position from a maritime point of view. And it was only then that the great importance of Archangel was realised and also the problematic value of a little-known port on the Murman coast by name Alexandrovsk, an ice-free, deep-

water harbour a hundred versts (sixty-six miles) as the crow flies, east by south from the Norwegian frontier.

In a colossal empire like that of Russia one must expect development along all lines to be somewhat tardy; money must be allocated, plans submitted and first attention given to the most important projects. But since absence of seaboard has ever been one of the flies in the Russian ointment, it is rather surprising that for so long the claim of this northern coast-line should have been ignored. According to a statement published in *The Times* some time after the declaration of war, Alexandrovsk is at last to be connected by railway via Rowaniemi in the government of Uleaborg with Tornea, the present terminus of the north Finnish railway. This route is a straight line of six hundred versts (four hundred miles) in length, and offers no constructive difficulty with the exception of swamps, a form of obstacle with which the Russian engineers are well acquainted and used to circumventing. The country through which the line will pass is almost uninhabited, but its advent would undoubtedly lead to an influx of settlers from Kem and other coast towns, admirable settlers be it said, lithe, active and hardy.

The inception of Alexandrovsk was due to the late Count de Witte, the former Minister of Finance, who, whatever may be said anent his creation of the vodka monopoly, was a far-sighted statesman. He quickly grasped the potential value of this harbour when he visited the Murman coast in 1894, and it was due to his initiative that the matter ever received serious attention. Count Engelhardt, the Russian Governor of Archangel province, in 1898

(vide *A Russian Province of the North*, by A. Engelhardt, 1899) personally visited the prospective port, by which time it was already in telegraphic communication with the outside world. From his description it could not be called an attractive locality, though he estimated the harbour to be one and a third miles long by about five hundred yards wide, completely sheltered and with a depth of water up to the very shore of from ten to thirteen fathoms. Judging from the above-mentioned work there appears to have been a burst of enthusiasm over this newly found naval base. Forthwith, the sum of £42,000 was voted for its development and by 1898 a settlement had been created complete with "Church, school, hospital, police, office, treasury, Justice Chamber, dwellings for officials, post and telegraph office, hotel, public baths, warehouses, granaries, a salt depôt and so forth."

Count Engelhardt was an enthusiast and an optimist, and had he been spared it seems reasonable to suppose that Alexandrovsk would have emerged from the obscurity into which it was destined to sink for another eighteen years. But, unfortunately, his successors in office appear either to have been inert or else their appeals for financial assistance were disregarded. However that may be, one can but judge by facts as they are and to-day, according to the last census, Alexandrovsk numbers only five hundred and sixteen inhabitants, while in the semi-official Guide it is stated that there is a residence for the Uyezdnie Nachalnik (District Governor), though one gathers that that official must prefer existence elsewhere since it is also stated that the chief life of the town depends upon the arrival

and departure of the weekly steamers of the Murman Steamship Company! Not an exhilarating outlook, certainly, especially when it is remembered that in the neighbourhood there is a complete absence of vegetation, and that for five months of the year there is practically perpetual darkness.

That is, however, the worst aspect of the case. Alexandrovsk really has unlimited possibilities. All that is required is their practical utilisation. In Varanger Fiord, still further north, the Norwegians have found valuable iron ore and, summer and winter, steamers trade thence to Philadelphia. In this mining centre climatic conditions and local surroundings are even more unpropitious than at Alexandrovsk; but the Norwegians are a practical people, whereas the Russians are born theorists. If this railway to Tornea ever materialises, as it should have done a decade ago, if the exploitation of this northern harbour is placed in capable hands, if cranes and warehouses are erected before public buildings of inordinate size and magnificence, then it is safe to assert that Russia will have to thank the war for having brought forcibly to her notice a natural asset of the greatest importance.

I have before made mention of what are picturesquely called the "white nights," when the daylight is perpetual and one forgets bedtime. But it was not until we started to wander round the White Sea that we found them a positive nuisance. Our steamers appeared to take a perverse pleasure in arriving at ports between two and four in the morning. It was yet early in the season and after the long winter, I suppose, it was natural that residents, isolated as they are, should want to

renew acquaintance with the rest of the world. And there was also the magnetic attraction of beer! As soon as the boat arrived, irrespective of time, it was eagerly stormed by noisy, hilarious, thirsty mortals who completely monopolised the dining saloon, and who always insisted upon making a tour of the cabins to see whether they could find any friends on board. Protest was quite useless, and eventually we discovered that the line of least resistance was to do as they did, putting in a little sleep at odd moments. It was in this way that I met the only Englishman who lives in these parts, a timber-mill manager who claimed enthusiastically to be a Yorkshireman, though he told me that he had never been in England in his life. In Russia, more than in any other country perhaps, does one meet with such cases, and I was told of a gentleman of the prosaic name of, let us say, Henry Brown, who could not speak a word of English, though it was, nominally, his own tongue.

Most of these little harbours are pretty, some quite beautiful. For instance, Ketet. At one end of a land-locked lagoon nestles the village surrounded completely with low-lying hills covered with pines. Its atmosphere might be melancholy, but the women who come to unload the boats are strapping creatures of great strength with hearty laughs and ever-ready repartee. They scramble about over piles of merchandise, barrels and boxes, with wonderful agility in spite of numberless coloured petticoats; there is always a perpetual storm of chaff going on between those on the ocean steamer and those in the lighters. One old man with his son provoked great hilarity. He was a Korelian, speaking very little Russian, and all that

he had for sale were two bottles of the pinkest kvass. He waxed most indignant when a soldier leaning over the side offered him five roubles for his boat with the boy thrown in, or three roubles without the fair-haired, blue-eyed lad who sat dumb through it all, unable to understand a word.

Probably the most considerable place along this coast is Kovda, at the mouth of the Kandalaksha Bay; it is a prosperous-looking little town and actually boasts of a cinema. In the summer the programme is naturally easy of alteration by means of the weekly mail boat, but in the winter the films have to be sent from Uleaborg in Finland, a distance of about four hundred miles, by sleigh, with not a post-house the whole journey. Surely this must be a record in the cinematographic world.

By now it is common knowledge that the vodka monopoly in Russia is abolished for ever, though after the war, presumably, private manufacture and sale will once more be permitted. But long prior to the outbreak of hostilities an arrangement had been come to whereby, by popular vote, the Government dram shops could be closed, and in Northern Russia advantage had very largely been taken of this measure. And, in this connection, it is interesting to note that these little villages round the White Sea took the lead in the whole of Northern Russia and abolished vodka from their midst. For, as a fat forestry official from Turkestan once said to me—and it might almost be turned into a proverb—"Where there are two, there is vodka." And the amount of drunkenness which used to exist was unmentionable. I have seen a moujik, already far gone, having his mouth held open for him and the vodka being poured into it by

two of his friends who were quite determined that he should not be deprived of his fair share.

The captains of these White Sea steamers have to be expert pilots since existing charts are either unreliable or, like the Bellman's in the *The Hunting of the Snark*, consist of a blank. And of all the navigation, that from Kovda to Kandalaksha is the most hazardous. Here indeed is the end of all things. A few scattered houses planted in the lee of a gaunt, cruel-looking hill, which still boasted patches of snow even in the month of June. There is a sad little cemetery, a box of a church and the silence of the wild. From here northward right up to the Arctic Ocean there is a vast, semi-explored area of rolling, mountainous country where the stunted vegetation only serves to emphasise the rugged cruelty of the savage desolation.

The natives of Kandalaksha are on a par with their scenery. They are uncouth, almost barbaric; the sight of a camera produced not interest or curiosity, but rather hostility. With one little girl, whose name we found to be Anna, we attempted to make friends, but all to no purpose. As soon as the camera was produced she drew up her lip, shrank away and literally snarled. I believe that these people have a theory that if a photograph is taken of them they lose a certain amount of their vitality, which would, to some extent, explain their attitude. All the men and boys were dressed alike, wearing enormously thick woollen jerseys with red collars and cuffs, whilst into the whole jersey there was worked an intricate pattern of red and black on a white ground. The effect was extremely handsome, and we were told that the design was a peculiarity of the place. The women are responsible for the

WHITE SEA, KANDALAKSHA.
Taken at 11 p.m.

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knitting and the cost of the wool alone is fourteen shillings, though to be sure, such jerseys probably last a lifetime.

At Kandalaksha we made rather unpleasant acquaintance with the Russian forestry official. Naturally, the pick of the profession are not sent to out-of-the-way places such as the White Sea hinterland, and in addition, some allowance must be made for the loneliness and discomfort of their lives. But certainly at Kandalaksha we encountered the worst specimens of their craft and the only Russian officials—to be quite precise they were Poles—who were discourteous during a journey of some thousands of miles. There were two of them, and they came on board with the fixed determination of getting drunk. They started with beer, then they went on to red wine, thence to champagne and back again to beer. Then, since the process was becoming disagreeably rapid, they sobered themselves up with coffee and started again with liqueurs and more beer. The noise of their conversation rose higher and higher; they tried to sing, and when remonstrated with by a steward, who said that there were passengers who wanted to sleep, they threatened to throw him overboard. But their punishment was adequate. They became maudlin, and from that passed on to the comatose stage, after which, willy-nilly, they were carried to cabins for the rest of the night. At five in the morning we weighed anchor and we had the satisfaction of seeing these gentlemen land at a point sixty miles down the coast, from whence they would have to get back to their stations by tarantass, a lengthy and expensive amusement. In addition they were charged their first-class fare, so that, on

the whole, their evening's amusement cost them uncommonly dear.

Whilst in this region I made many enquiries anent sport, but from all I could hear there is little to be done in that direction. The cause appears to be lack of game laws, at least lack of application of game laws, and indiscriminate gunning by forestry officials and others. Even wolves are very rarely seen. I was told by a gentleman, who for fourteen years has made a habit of travelling extensively right through the loneliest portions of this territory in search of timber, that he had only once seen a wolf and that then the beast was out of range. That fact has a special significance for me since, from the travellers' tales with which one is regaled by those who have never been more than five miles out of Petrograd, one might well imagine that winter travel in Russia involved real danger to life and limb from this cause.

The night previous to our arrival at Umba we determined to sleep. There being only one method to keep out inquisitive visitors, we adopted it and barricaded ourselves in our cabin with complete success. And glad we were that we did, since gradually we had been growing more tired and more tired and we wanted freshness and vigour to do justice to what, were it known, might well be described as one of the beauty spots of the world. Umba is situated at the top of a long, very narrow fiord and is slightly reminiscent of the river Fowey just above the town of the same name.

Perhaps because the sun was shining and because we were in mood for enjoyment, the surroundings seemed enchanting. Never did pine trees rustle more invitingly nor display to better advantage the

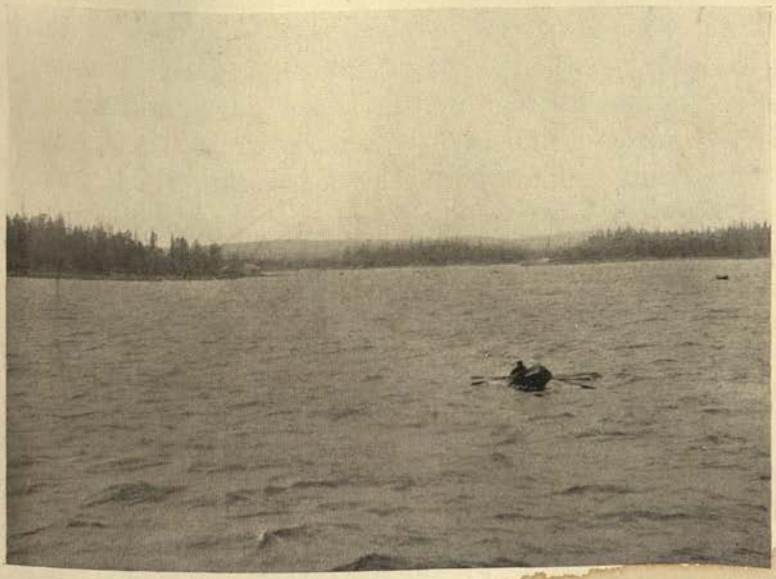
varying shades of their green. Never did water seem of a deeper blue and never have I seen prettier girls. For some reason or another there was a most fascinating air of camaraderie about the place; everyone was on excellent terms with everyone else. The Customs officer introduced himself, professed himself delighted to see English folk and insisted upon celebrating the occasion in the only way,—beer. The manager of the local mill openly boasted of the beauty of the Umba ladies, and insisted on our coming on deck in order to satisfy ourselves as to the justice of his statements. In a boat below we saw the belle of the village. She was a brunette with the most twinkling of eyes; a crimson kerchief was fastened on her shoulders and she sported an old cotton skirt of a rich blue. Her mother, who must have once surpassed her in charm, judging from the regularity of her aquiline features, was a delicious study in orange, yellow ochre and brown. They were both laughing and showing their perfectly regular white teeth as they received and replied to jests and greetings from the ship. And as boat after boat load would pull away for the shore having discharged their cargo, the rowers, always women, would break into song—silvery, happy song which well matched the brightness of the day.

At no place did we seem to have had so much cargo to load. Up they came in the slings, mysterious, oblong, wicker-work baskets with coarse grass packing showing through the interstices. What could they be? I hazarded fish, since at Umba there is a very special kind of salmon-trout Curiosity seized me, so I asked the mate. His answer was dramatic and brusque. "Empty beer bottles." "Beer bottles?" I reiterated. "Yes,"

he said, "the relics of the winter supply,—nineteen thousand of them. They don't do themselves badly at Umba, I can tell you!" I have always regarded the Russian as having an average thirst, but nineteen thousand bottles and a beer-drinking population of, I should say, about nineteen—my admiration is too great for words!

Eastwards from Umba, the scenery changes rapidly and rocky headlands give way to uninteresting, flat, sandy spits. Every two or three hours the ship would stop without even taking the trouble to anchor and would roll about restlessly off a little village scarcely visible to the naked eye. Only the inevitable minute white church with its green dome showed that at least some poor priest was ministering to the care of souls even in so unpromising a milieu. And then, out would shoot a little boat, looking dangerous in its frailty, rowed as likely as not by an ancient dame, and with a scramble and a welcoming shout we should have secured another moujik passenger bound, maybe, for Archangel or perhaps on his way to do his military service at some far-off centre. I have often thought of the men in these parts, and what they must be doing in the present war. There is a picturesque touch about the Cossacks which has lent them readily to the pen of the descriptive writer, and hence in the foreign papers one sees constant mention of them. But of these fine, hardy, care-free Northerners—what of them? One cannot help but imagine that they have acquitted themselves gloriously, though in any army like that of Russia, even units such as these are lost when they become merged into the grey-green clad millions of the Russian soldiery.

WHITE SEA. A "LIGHTER."
Note the women at the oars.



THE "BLACK RIVER."

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In the White Sea fishing is the principal industry, outside of timber. Many hundreds of barrels of salted herrings find their way from its ports to archangel and may be bought as far inland as Siberia. Naturally the industry is carefully protected, there being several local coast-guard vessels to prevent fishing within a three-mile limit. In this connection I was told—with how much truth I should not like to say—that the old monks of Solovetz have a keen eye on this end of the business and fire without hesitation upon trespassers.

The coasting vessels which, in the main, carry the catches to rail-head are fine fore and aft schooners. They are invariably painted white, and there is something eerie in the way they silently loom up out of the blue-grey haze of early morning, shout a greeting and as silently pass away again. Of course, it is only fancy, but of all the seas in the world, the White Sea seems to be the most solemn. In rough weather or in fair there clings to it an intense loneliness as though it was determined to synchronise with the lonelinesses which fringe it. For sheer desolation it would surely be impossible to find a better example than the eastern shore. Here there is no single harbour, and if there be settlements, they consist of two or three miserable Samoyede huts. Moreover, it has a bad name with sailors. There is a strong set of the tide towards it and a captain told me that he had known himself ten miles off his course in five hours. Towards the mouth of the estuary one runs in closer to land and can better judge of the surroundings—the most stunted of vegetation and verst upon verst of salt swamp. I should imagine that the Coast-guard and Customs

station at the very entrance of the River Dwina must be amongst the most forlorn places in the world.

We there had to disembark a short, very plump Customs officer who viewed the pending operation with considerable dismay. A boat came out for the purpose manned by people who, judging from the way they rowed, ought to have been gardeners, if they had such a thing in these parts; each man was doing the best he could for himself, quite irrespective of his neighbour. Somehow they got alongside—more by good luck than good management—and their officer with his sword, over which he kept tripping, eventually reached the boat. Poor man! He was horribly afraid, and his feelings were not relieved by the hearty laughter of those on board, coupled with much good advice. But he was lucky in his orderly, a great strapping six-footer who in the most motherly and protecting way put an arm around his shoulder and evidently murmured words of sympathy to him.

And so we passed onwards upstream. Past more stretches of timber waste, then past a saw-mill, emblem of civilisation, past the outward-bound pilgrim boat to Solovetz which gave us a cheer, then through a narrow gut which, incidentally, was temporarily and unnecessarily blocked at the commencement of the war by three German "tramp steamers," past the grain boats lying in the Solombola pool and so up to the Murman Steamship Wharf—our destination.

CHAPTER VI

VELIKI USTJUG: THE FLORENCE OF THE NORTH

ALL our friends were agreed upon one point. It was that we must go to Veliki Ustjug, which one enthusiastic Russian lady described as rivalling Florence in the richness and number of its churches. In winter the journey thither must be made by sleigh, but in summer there is excellent steamboat communication by the boats of the Vologda-Archangel Company. So one Saturday afternoon we put our traps on the *Pietr Veliki* and started away upstream. The ship was only pleasantly filled, the majority of the passengers being Archangel business men who found this an excellent method of spending their week-end, transhipping on the Sunday to the downward boat.

The Dwina came as a surprise to us. We had pictured the banks as being dreary expanses of swamp and desolation, but to our great astonishment we saw only summery-looking woods, showing the most wonderful multitudinous shades of green, interspersed every now and then with snug, prosperous-looking little villages. I was told by an Archangel business man that the chief industry of all these peasants along the Dwina is the supply of salt meat for the Archangel factories. Not only are these moujiks independent, but extremely well-to-do, and my informant was emphatic in his opinion that,

comparatively, they were very much better off than the average agricultural labourer in England.

The most noticeable feature of the river is the extraordinary deposit of alabaster which lines the right bank for some miles. It so happened that we stopped at this precise point for firewood, and during a stroll ashore, we had every opportunity of closely examining the white cliffs. Kluchevsky states that as long ago as 1680 a company was formed for the exploitation of the deposit, and engineers under the leadership of a German—even then the German was ubiquitous in the Russian Empire—were despatched to the spot to see what could be done. Apparently nothing resulted, and after a lapse of more than two centuries things seem to be very much as they were in those days. Of course the material being heavy, the cost of transport would be very considerable to any point, that is, where the product could be efficiently worked. Still, the fact remains that the deposits are on such an enormous scale that one cannot help thinking that the time will come when a proper exploitation will be deemed worth while.

A perfect summer morning with the softest of breezes whispering through the birch trees, fringing the banks of the River Suchona, heralded our approach to Veliki Ustjug. Round a bluff the sturdy little steamer swung against a good six-knot current and there, away on the right, nestled this quaint and remote townlet which, were it situated in other latitudes, would undoubtedly draw visitors from afar as with a magnet. For of all the towns in strange countries I have chanced to visit, I know of none that makes such instant appeal to one's sympathies, an appeal

NORTHERN DWINA. ALABASTER CLIFFS.

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which time and familiarity only serves to strengthen.

It attracts the eye with the exuberance of its fantastic architecture, architecture, as always in Russia, of a religious type. Churches jostle one another as though individually anxious to reach the river-bank. There are large churches standing aloof, as it were, upon the higher ground, half-hidden by solemn pine trees; there are little churches which might have sprouted from the soil at the wave of the magician's wand, so gnome-like are they in appearance. And their domes present a bewildering complexity of hues—red, blue, green, golden, splashes of primitive colour setting off with admirable effectiveness the white or creamy tints of their structures. In short, at first sight one is reminded of a vast basin of iridescent soap-bubbles blown by a child from a clay pipe, for as far as the range of one's vision there appears a vista of nothing but church dome upon church dome, with only now and again a glimpse of some comfortable single-story dwelling which might well be a presbytery.

And in all truth, Veliki Ustjug is almost an ecclesiastical monopoly. The last official census gave its population as 11,137 and for the spiritual needs of this community, a community of approximately the same number as a county town like Aylesbury, there are forty churches. Not that it must be imagined that these are of a recent date for, with the exception of the new church at the Convent of St. John the Baptist, the majority date back to the sixteenth century, while two or three boast of a foundation during the year 1400. And herein lies one of the greatest charms of this little town.

The secret of Russia is in her Church; that mysterious force which in a greater or lesser degree grips her people, even though in its apparent essence it appears mediæval in its demands, its ceremonies and its beliefs. Hence those who would learn something of Russia must assuredly study with sympathy the spiritual life of her people.

In the big towns this is no easy matter. Convention is the greatest enemy of spontaneity of action. One must go far afield to find that unstudied simplicity which is the keynote of the Slav, and which, more than all else, influences his daily life and affects his attitude towards his brother man and his Maker. There appears to the foreigner something perhaps savouring of theatricalism when the moujik covers with kisses a precious ikon in a gorgeous "Sobor"—cathedral—but that is only because we cannot realise that this is the same man who, with the same devotion, kisses a copy of the same ikon in a remote and homely little church far removed from religious excitement. It is, so to speak, in the back-blocks of the "Russian Land," in small towns like Veliki Ustjug, that at leisure one may watch the moujik at his work and at his play, at his devotions and in his cups, and realise the better what manner of man he is.

Hence we had looked forward to our visit with no small amount of pleasurable excitement, and truly our first glimpse of this old township had more than fulfilled our expectations.

The arrival of the steamer is the great event in these river towns, situated far from the railway,—the nearest station to Veliki Ustjug is sixty miles distant,—and needless to say the advent of two obvious foreigners was not likely to pass without

VELIKI USTJÚG. WASHERWOMEN.
Note the birch-bark basket.

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comment. In fact we quickly obtained a somewhat embarrassing celebrity. I should describe curiosity as being one of the strongest characteristics of the Russian, quite irrespective of class, but it must be emphasised that there is nothing either impertinent or offensive therein. Rather is it naïve and ingenuous; it seems so incredible to the average Russian that people from other lands should ever trouble to travel vast distances to see what, to him, are normal scenes devoid of any particularly saving grace of interest or picturesqueness. Hence it is that, when one remarks casually in answer to a question that one is travelling for pleasure, one's questioner metaphorically puts his finger to his nose and says, "Ah-ha, now what does he really want? Is it grain or is it timber, or is it possible that a railway is going to be built here?"

And so it was with us. As soon as we had pushed our way ashore, an eager cohort of volunteer guides accompanied us to the hotel, or more correctly, inn, and in answer to my question whether David Simeonovitch was in town, a chorus assured me emphatically that he was not, that he had gone to Moscow on business, that his family was at home, however, and, well, but,—and that was the great point,—what did I want with him? "Oh, I have a letter for him, that's all," I answered. "Ah, the Barin has a letter for him?" It came as from one man, accompanied by a general exchange of glances and a rising curiosity. "And what is in the letter, Barin, and from whence have you come, and what do you wish to do here, and how long do you stay, and what country do you come from?" The answer to the last question was supplied by one

learned in the crowd who had been to Archangel and who recognised that we were not "Nyemtsi" (Germans) but English. Upon this there was a positive boom in popular interest, and I have no doubt that our future host must have seen our approach from afar, since he was on the doorstep awaiting us.

He was a fat, rather pompous person with a thick brown beard, a light alpaca coat, blue serge trousers and leather sandals. With a wave of his hand he demanded silence, and before hazarding anything further, requested of us our passports. These he studied with an intentness worthy of a nobler cause, since we discovered later that he was unable to read the Latin characters. Without more ado, however, our host, apparently well satisfied, ushered us into a guest-room which, somewhat to our surprise, was not only clean but comfortably furnished. Since the hotel stood on the river-bank and our room faced riverwards we had an exquisite view of mile upon mile of wonderful wooded country-side, with rolling downs beyond, dotted with farms and churches,—the dominant keynote of Russian scenery.

But since the Slav is usually paradoxical,—even his intimate surroundings bear witness to the fact, —our washing-basin in that room merits an entire paragraph. The Russians have a theory, and a reasonable one it seems, that it is not clean to wash one's hands in any but running water, that, in fact, if one washes in a pail or in a basin, one is dirtier after than before. Hence, universally in Russia are to be found washhand-stands with a reservoir and a curved tap, the latter on a pivot, the water being turned on by merely pulling the tap over the basin.

NORTHERN DWINA. DRIFTING SEAWARDS.

VELIKI USKJÚG. THE "FLORENCE" OF NORTH RUSSIA.
Note the churches.

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And, naturally, the bigger the reservoir the more powerful the stream of water. Our washhand-stand was a fine piece of furniture and was possessed of a particularly big reservoir, but the tap had been so screwed on that when over the basin it pointed upwards and towards the ceiling. Not noticing this, I turned the water on and the room looked as though it had been visited by a cloud-burst. I asked mine host what on earth induced him to tolerate such a topsy-turvy arrangement and he smiled gently at my irritation, assuring me that it had always been like that and that he could not see any advantage in having it any other way. He then took the opportunity of asking me to fill in the police form for him since he could not read the passport, and as I wrote down the various details, he commented freely upon them.

" Is that your wife, then ? Oh, I thought it was your sister, but it is as you say,—there is not much likeness. Age, 36. Only 36 ? Well, you look more than that. Only you are very fat and that makes a difference, does it not ? Profession ? Author. Well, I declare, you are the first author I have ever met. And I have always wanted to meet one. What do you write about ? Veliki Ustjug ? Come, come, that's a joke ! " And he laughed heartily. " Ah, yes, you know Simeonovitch ? Of course, he's a Jew, but he's a very good man. It's funny he never told me that he knew an author considering that I know him as my brother. Now if you had said you were a merchant, then I should have understood. And how much, may I ask, do you make by your writing ? " was his final thrust, one of those delicate lance-like

thrusts which find their way through the joints of the toughest armour.

Like most Russian towns, Veliki Ustjug has no paved streets. In the winter the snow lies deep and forms a natural pavement, but in the summer dust and mud alternate and the progress of the pedestrian is slow. However, that is of minor import since the place lies snug, and it is possible to explore all its nooks and crannies at little expense to shoe-leather.

First we wended our way to the Cathedral of the Assumption, which is famous for a miraculous ikon of Our Lady. Of medium size, it is thickly encrusted with pearls and precious stones, including some enormous emeralds, though the latter are of poorish colour. None the less the *tout ensemble* is almost stupefying, for involuntarily one is drawn into making contrasts, and it is not difficult to believe that the value of this ikon alone would more than suffice to buy up the town, lock, stock and barrel. The cathedral was thronged with pilgrims of the poorer classes, and again one was tempted into a certain vein of thought. It stands out as a remarkable feature in the character of the Russian moujik, that poor, sick or hungry as he may be, it would never occur to him to commit sacrilege and steal from a church. Hence the most valuable ikons and other church ornaments are left totally unguarded in the safe keeping of the popular devotion.

Outside, the sun streamed down upon the street which, with its dazzling white houses, its occasional patches of deep green and its cloisters, possessed a distinctly Italian touch. Time must have been when Veliki Ustjug was in all truth like some

Siena. Probably its genesis was that of the monastic outpost and thither other religious were gradually attracted; then peasantry came to seek protection, merchants to trade, and thus was built up a thriving community. Later the wave of monastic expansion passed on, churches were closed, communities dissolved, but the traders remained, with the result that, since the days of Peter the Great, this northern township has occupied no mean position in the commercial prosperity of the Dwina watershed. But the legacy of the churches, now mostly deserted, is the vista afforded by every street with its coronet of domes and belfries, its wonderful colour scheme, its soft warmth of light and shade, the silent dignity of its trees and the sense of quiet restfulness. To-day at every turn one finds these cloisters living on the memories of the past, or given over to small shopkeepers who are Oriental in their entreaties to a possible purchaser and to whom a bargain involving fifteen minutes of haggling is as the breath of life.

As already stated, Simeonovitch was not at home, so I presented my letter to the next best person, his wife. Nothing could have exceeded her charming courtesy or the readiness with which she placed herself at our disposal and introduced us to her family. This family, as a whole, was remarkable to us, but I am assured that there are many such in the small towns of Northern Russia. Briefly, one and all of its members specialised along an individual line, and thus they had succeeded in obtaining a truly remarkable hold upon the general business of the community, needless to say with the most satisfactory results to themselves. Thus,

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the father was a timber-merchant and financier, this latter term translatable in the very broadest sense and probably including a certain amount of discreet money-lending. The mother kept a dress-making establishment, whilst the only son was a jeweller and watchmaker. There were four daughters, the eldest of whom was a certificated dentist. The second was an accoucheuse and feld-scher. The third had the only bonnet-shop in the place, and quite a good one at that my wife assured me, whilst the youngest had considerable musical talent and already, at the age of fifteen, made a little extra by piano tuning and giving lessons to those less instructed than herself.

Hence this one family had some of the most valuable commercial and professional assets in the town within their undivided control, and parenthetically it must be remarked, that they apparently well deserved their success. I can vouch for the fact that they lived on the happiest terms with the townspeople, even a nun of the Orthodox Church remarking to me anent the dentist, "She is a very good girl and we all like her so much at the Monastery." (In Russia the word Nunnery is translated Female Monastery.)

It was explained to me that at the present stage of Russian development, regularly certificated doctors, dentists and specialised obstetricians find they can command all the work they can accomplish in the large towns and that, the supply not being equal to the demand, it is nothing short of a boon that there are Jews willing to study and take degrees, and who find it worth while to go far afield and start practices in the smaller places. Certain

it is that without them many would be in a sorry plight. Such Jews are naturally privileged people since this right of domicile is only granted to some professional men and women, merchants of the first guild who have to pay a crushing licence within the Pale for five consecutive years, and certain master artisans. The *Russian Year Book* gives some interesting facts in connection with this subject, which is too complex to receive minute attention in this chapter.

But the point which I do wish to make is the following. Russia is a vast country and at times her treatment of Jewry has come under the fire of severe criticism. Equally, those comprising Jewry form a vast and complex race, and those who would compare the greasy denizen of the Franziskanka,—one of the chief streets of Warsaw,—slouching along in his jarmulka and halat with my friends of Veliki Ustjug, would make a grievous mistake. Bye and large, the Jews outside the Pale in the Russian Empire are not so dissatisfied as Russia's enemies would like to believe. The worst epithet I ever heard applied by such a Jew to Russian officialdom was that its officers were ofttimes "grubi," which may be translated, "rough." And also certain is it that they prefer to be under Russian rule rather than to be forced to submit to any foreign domination, particularly German. Not the least unpleasant surprise for Germany when she started her war against Russia was the attitude of the Jews within the Russian Empire as a whole.

They came forward in their thousands ready to show in practical fashion their affection for the country which sheltered them. It often happens

that individuals differ strongly anent affairs in daily life—politics and so forth—but they still remain friends. And so it appears to be with the Jews in Russia,—that is to say, with those who have, so to speak, emancipated themselves and have long left the Pale. They may regret Russian action. They may totally and entirely disagree with it. Yet withal they have a sincere affection for the "Russian land," and they are prepared to show it by any means within their power.

Those who have lived in Warsaw will allow that the Warsaw Jew is a person apart. He may retain all that is outwardly emblematical of his race. He may follow the ancient rites of his belief to the last letter of the law, but in so doing he aims rather at irritating the Gentile than at giving glory to God. Contiguity to the German frontier has partially teutonised him, and his sympathies, if he has any, are distinctly pro-German. But he is wily enough to smother too obvious an indication of that fact, since it would be clearly impolitic to be openly anti-Russian. Hence he hides himself behind a barrier of suspicious reserve and forms an ever-present problem of a most unpleasant nature, a problem not clearly understood even by those of his own race who live in other countries.

In Poland the Jews possess three-quarters of the money in the country, but they retard foreign trade by their perpetual dishonesty, for proof of which statement reference need only be made to our Consular reports, and there are recruited from their ranks the most active members of the Terrorist and Nihilist organisations. The introduction of the automatic pistol was a bad day for the Russian police in Warsaw. They were shot

down in twos and threes,—always from behind,—yet the sympathy of the world was not theirs! It seems certain that if after the war there be a reconstructed Polish kingdom under the suzerainty of the Czar, the Poles will be the first to endeavour to make some amelioration of their own position by freeing their country of a proportion of these undesirable denizens.

The following anecdote anent the difficulties that the Jew sometimes has to encounter in Russia was told me by the gentleman himself, and it is not without a certain amount of humour. The person referred to occupied an important position in an English timber company at Archangel and received in consequence a considerable salary. But he was not a member of the Merchants' Guild and the idea of parting with so much good money as the admission to it would entail, plus living within the Pale for five years, hurt him almost to tears, more especially considering the length of time during which he had been unmolested. To make himself quite safe, however, and to circumvent the authorities, he decided to register himself officially as a bookbinder,—thus coming under the Skilled Artisans Guild. A suitable sign was bought to hang outside the house, machinery of the most modern type was installed, and even circulars were rashly printed. In parenthesis, I should remark that this gentleman was no bad judge of comfort and possessed a home furnished with exquisite taste, the same sheltering his old mother. The suspicions of the Nachalnik (Head of the Police) having been aroused, an officer arrived with a sheaf of official documents which he most politely requested might be stitched while he waited. It

was a grim little comedy which, needless to say, could only have one ending, namely, the discomfiture of my friend.

"And this furniture," said the officer pompously, "will be sold when you and your mother are safely back in the Pale, the proceeds being duly sent to you." He might have said, "The proceeds, minus those little deductions which have a way of evaporating into the pockets of officialdom and which have been known to constitute as much as three-quarters of the whole."

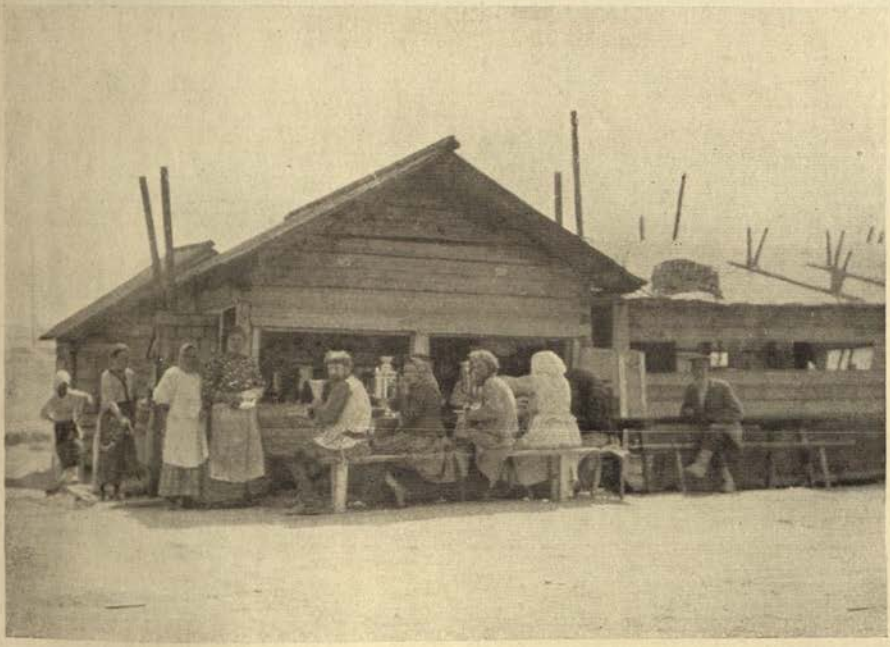
"I am afraid that is impossible," was my friend's answer, "you cannot sell this furniture, it belongs to my employer."

"Nonsense," said the officer, "we know all about that; we have had you under observation for months. I shall immediately visit your employer, and, well,—you'll be pretty well fined for misrepresentation of facts."

Collapse of my friend. The policeman departed and drove in haste to the English employer who blandly confirmed all that his employé had said. Astonishment of official; chagrin of Nachalnik; amusement of employé and great joy of the old mother who, having listened to the conversation, had telephoned!

Human nature is much the same the entire world over, and there is something infinitely delightful in for once getting the better of the police. It only remains for me to say that my friend is now a member of the First Guild of Merchants, that he is to-day a much respected member of the Archangel community and that to his good-nature I owe many kindly suggestions and introductions on our journey.

One of the outstanding features of life in these



VELIKI USTJÙG. MOUJIKS AND THEIR SAMOVAR.
"Any time is tea-time."

VELIKI USTJÙG. THE FERRY (*vide* Text).

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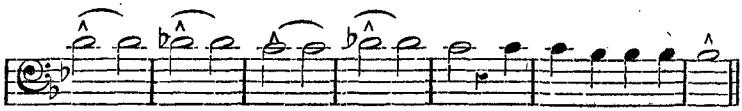
small, riverside towns is the indiscriminate use made of the passenger steamers by the inhabitants. It is no exaggeration to say that they are regarded as a sort of perambulatory restaurant, plus town garden, plus club, plus promenade. Due to the fact that in most Russian hotels the restaurant is entirely separate from the hotel proper, and that in the smaller fry, such as ours at Veliki Ustjug, there is no restaurant at all, visitors are obliged usually to cater for themselves. Doubtless such was the origin of the steamers' popularity and, needless to say, we took advantage of it.

It was a never-ending source of interest to watch the young men and maidens tramp round and round the deck in the scorching sun, occasionally perhaps slaking their thirst with glasses of iced beer. Here also the municipal officials usually gathered for their *déjeuner*, an odd priest or two would drop in to pass the time of day, while it was the favourite place for the local merchants to rest and discuss their business.

The departure of these steamers is accordingly haphazard; someone has ordered a "bitki" (a sort of Hamburg steak) and states the fact in no uncertain fashion when the steward suggests that the boat is about to start again upon its journey. The captain is appealed to. "What, go on? When I have not had my bitki? Impossible!" "Nichevo," says the captain, slapping the complainer on the shoulder, "that'll be all right! As long as we get to Vologda the day after to-morrow it is all the same." So the ship blows the siren again and again, and then again, and there can be no excuse for passengers being left behind unless it be that they have grown accustomed to

the constant cry of "Wolf," and will not disturb themselves.

The stevedores who discharge the cargo and for about ten hours' most strenuous toil per diem receive the immense emolument of six roubles (thirteen shillings) weekly, are magnificent specimens of humanity. "Who said sad Russians?" They would withdraw that expression if they could watch those men sweating and singing in an almost infernal heat. A heavy piece of machinery has to be landed. A rope is hitched around it and a dozen or so giants clad only in loose shirts and trousers, line up. The wag of the party sings some self-made stanza such as "My wife has drunk all the vodka, but she won't do it again, that's certain." Whereon all the others, laughing like a lot of schoolboys, join in a chorus the melody of which is roughly,



and the refrain of which sounds like, "*Otlas*, Otlas, *Otlas*, Otlas, *Otlas*, ho-I-ho." Up comes the machinery from the hold; there is a general wiping of brows, a broadside of pleasantry is exchanged with the onlookers, and they are ready for the next item.

The outstanding feature of the peasant in these northern parts of Russia is his independence of manner, coupled always with the most perfect courtesy. A friend of mine used to maintain that the Russian moujik was the only being who ever apologised for being drunk and was not offensive. And such an one approached us as we lay lazily basking in the long grass of the river-bank watching

the leisurely operations of the ferry, of which more anon. His clothes were nondescript, almost to the verge of nothingness; he had a seraphic smile and he badly wanted to talk.

The burden of his song was—I have just come out of prison this morning and I have celebrated the occasion. In answer to a gentle enquiry as to what he had done he replied with the same seraphic smile, "Nothing." Which led to the further remark on our part that he must be, in plain Russian, "piani" (drunk). No, he was not drunk, he insisted, only he was very happy again to be free. He hated vodka, so he assured us, and he concluded with a touching appeal for ten kopecks wherewith to purchase some other refreshing liquid. Dear me! He had only just discovered that we were foreigners,—Nyemtsi,—well, so much the better. We should understand that he was no inferior person, no common moujik, but an "unfortunate." In Russia this term is applied to anything from an epileptic to a homicidal maniac and always carries with it a great appeal to the sympathies. No, we did not feel inclined to part with ten kopecks; well, the world was a very hard place and he must be going on. With which he stood up, took his hat off with all the grace of an habitual courtier and shook us warmly by the hand. From a distance our host at the hotel had espied us and hurrying up begged us to have no further dealings with the gentleman in question. He was, it appeared, the bad man of Veliki Ustjug,—not a very dangerous one, we fancied.

It was very pleasant to loll in the long, rank grass alongside the river and to realise that time does not spell money in these latitudes. Every-

thing imparted this atmosphere of leisurely content; it was mirrored not only in the inhabitants, but in the cattle, the horses, the dogs, even in the ferry. Which brings me to a point. How long we watched the ferry to discover its motive power I know not, but it must have been days. Here was no motor, no steam, no chain, no horse and no windlass. Only a rope dangled over the bow and seemed purposelessly to be attached to a distant buoy in midstream. Then it dawned upon us; the current was the propelling force, coupled with an abnormally long rudder. When alongside, the rudder was pushed hard over and the boat was shoved out into deep water with poles. The current caught the blade of the rudder and did the rest. Simple, cheap and in thorough keeping with its surroundings. Only, it was leisurely to the pitch of distraction. The river here must have been about three hundred yards wide and the passage habitually took some thirty minutes. These ferries are not uncommon in Russia and even in Siberia. They are usually free, the municipality providing the barge and paying the helmsman. Needless to say, with a good current running, the progress is appreciably quicker. The idea is certainly ingenious and we had never before noticed it elsewhere.

And if life moves slowly, so do thought and action. One of the most remarkable things in Russia is that even in considerable centres of population, no one knows anything about a district possibly only about fifty versts distant. One will ask a question and will be met with a blank, uncompromising statement of ignorance. Or, what is much more disconcerting, five separate people will give five separate versions with the

praiseworthy intention of being of real assistance. "No, we were never in Viatka," they will say, "and we cannot think why you want to go there." For example, our host consulted with a friend and brought us one plan of action; the only wine-merchant in the town, who took a deep interest in our welfare, brought us another, and the clerk at the steamship office derided both and propounded a much cheaper, surer and better route which we eventually followed.

Whilst we were in Ustjug there was great excitement. The Governor of the province was to arrive. The streets were cleaned as well as might be, there was some display of bunting and, of course, there was a public dinner. It was our privilege later to see the Governor, a paternal old gentleman with a most charming smile, receiving the local officials and bidding them farewell. Local officialdom in Russia is very nervous and, like officialdom in other countries, seems badly to need stage management for its hands. There is no arguing the point that one's hands are, on occasion, in the way, and never more so than when in the presence of a superior, even though he prove a good-natured one. These lesser lights came by ones and twos and fidgeted perceptibly while the Governor spoke kindly to each, and impressed upon him how much he might accomplish in his own person by a strict regard for his duties and his department. I heard him say one thing which impressed me. It was: "Gentlemen, as regards your town—make boulevards. Let the air in." A more suitable suggestion was never framed. "Let the air in!!"

The Governors of the great Russian provinces are men upon whom an enormous responsibility

hangs. They are, as a rule, poorly paid considering the scope of their activities. The Governor of Archangel Province receives £1500 a year and a house and has an area to control almost the size of France. In him is vested a supreme authority, and if he is capable, honest and just, the welfare of his people will claim his constant attention. As a whole they are a refined class of men, keen to advance their charge materially by all means within their grasp, though there are others whose ideas are elastic anent *meum* and *tuum*, and who owe their positions merely to State influence. These are the exceptions, however, rather than the rule. Nominally, each Governor visits all the towns in his province once annually, and it is by this means that, indirectly, the great distances are linked up which join the provinces with Petrograd.

Our friends the Simeonovitch family proved most anxious to entertain us and suggested that we should inspect the great female monastery of St. John the Baptist which, situated on a hill, dominates Veliki Ustjug.

It was a boiling day, the sun beating down with that tropical fierceness which is one of the idiosyncrasies of Northern Russia. The roads were at their dustiest and consequently the going was heavy, though as step by step we ascended the incline, we were amply repaid by the ever-spreading panorama which met our eyes.

Much has been written anent these great convents which besprinkle the "Russian Land"; much of the criticism levelled at them has been bitter. They have been depicted as the most dreadful dens of iniquity, and travellers from Siberia have told me in all good faith stories which, if true, would demand

VELIKI USTJÙG. MARKET AND CHURCH OF THE TRANSFIGURATION.

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governmental supervision if not total suppression. But, as is so often the case when it comes to direct evidence, none is obtainable. It is always, "Someone told me," or, "I have heard it from a reliable source"; the reliable source being quite possibly a stranger in the train. Such evidence is valueless. It does stand to reason, no doubt, that where great numbers of women and girls are gathered together scandals will sometimes occur, especially when it is remembered that the discipline is much laxer than that imposed upon its religious by the Catholic Church. Equally true is it, however, that there must be some moral force at work which will transform a girl with no training of any kind into a hard-working unit at some specialised form of employment. There must be some satisfactory substratum of discipline which will keep high-spirited young women busy at their tasks for fourteen hours out of the twenty-four. As a rule, the nuns are recruited from the peasantry—to be precise about ninety per cent come from this source—and of this percentage a considerable number are illegitimate children who otherwise would have no chance in the world. There is, moreover, a rule forbidding final vows until the age of forty, which is the earliest that the individual can take the veil for life. Hence, these female monasteries are really something more in the nature of female co-operative communities; they are self-supporting by their own labours, they are schools of art, needlework and even of domestic duty such as cooking, and the religious aspect is kept very reasonably at a common-sense level. In some cases these establishments have launched out into commercial enterprises, flour mills, farming and the like, and of

necessity they are obliged to employ civilian labour. In this direction there are, I believe, abuses, since the good nuns, being exceedingly capable and shrewd business women, trade on the fact that the moujik is working for a religious community and accordingly underpay him. Moreover, and this I saw myself, the conditions under which their employees work are sometimes very bad and would not be tolerated were they applied to a civil undertaking. In a flour mill, some ten versts from Veliki Ustjug, which we visited, the air was so thick with floating particles and the ventilation was so bad that breathing was very difficult. I remarked upon this to my guide, who told me that consumption and other pulmonary complaints were rife in consequence, but that no one seemed to care. Such instances are, I understand, rare, and on the whole Russian conventual establishments are well managed.

Our appearance at the entrance of St. John the Baptist was the signal for some excitement. Foreigners they rarely see in these parts, and even if in the town, such are seldom permitted to cross the threshold of this establishment. Consequently both nuns and novices peered at us with no little curiosity. The costume of the nuns was unbecoming; black, unrelieved in any way, with a curious close-fitting skull-cap which latter in the streets was surmounted by a large black velvet structure. The sisters were of all ages, some strikingly handsome and many with faces of great refinement. So refined, in fact, was one who incidentally turned out to be the Abbess, that I asked whether she did not belong to the educated classes. My answer was, No, she was peasant born.

We asked to see everything, and it was a distinctly human touch which made one of the nuns at once say, "Well, come along and see our refectory, you must be thirsty." We were. The inevitable kvass was produced and on this occasion drunk with enthusiasm; for its palatability was very different from the sour liquid we had endured at Solovetz. The refectory was low and long, its walls plentifully covered with pictures of saints, and it was spotlessly clean. Thence we were shown the sleeping accommodation; three or four nuns share a room which is subdivided so that there is a small sitting-room full of photographs and nicknacks, and a box of a kitchen—this latter because the midday meal alone is eaten in the refectory.

Altogether the atmosphere was homely and healthy. At this convent the work undertaken is chiefly embroidery, ikon painting, the making of ikon covers (riza, is the technical term), weaving and some carpentry. The embroidery may rightly rank, so we were told, with the finest work of its sort extant. Time is not money, and over one piece of work months will be spent; even then the price will be very reasonable. We were anxious to give an order but were told that it would be impossible to guarantee delivery within two years, so many orders were there in hand.

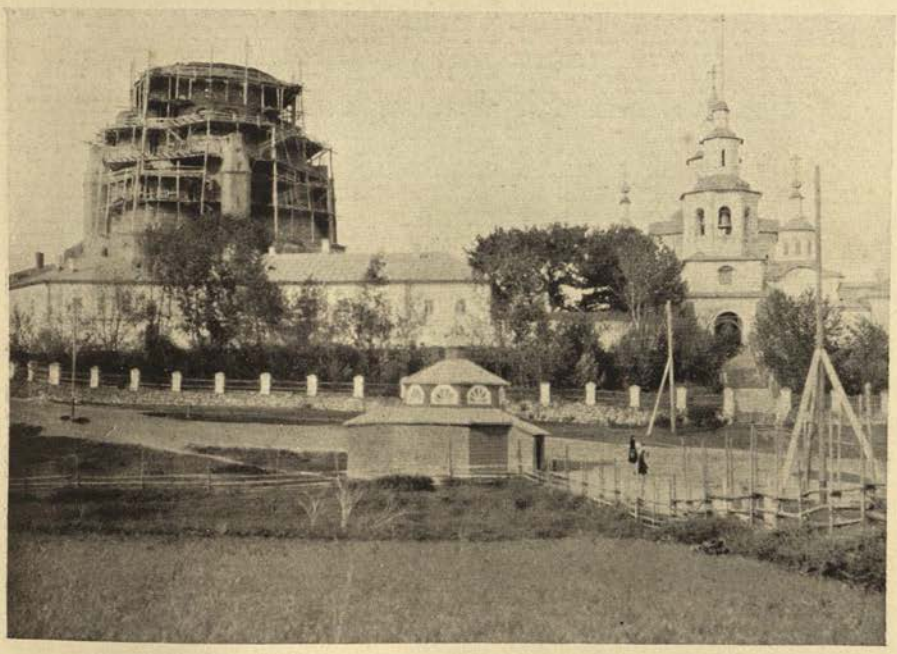
The ikon painting does not give much scope to artistic expression since for the most part it is crude in conception, and individualism is not allowed to be encouraged. Of modern ikons, unquestionably the best are made in Moscow, those coming from the monasteries rarely fetching high prices. The weaving was of a high standard and showed evidence of unsparing pains. But what was most striking

was the enthusiasm of the workers; theirs was a labour of love and compulsion played no part in the business.

Outside, a huge church was in course of construction; it is to outclass all other churches in Veliki Ustjug both in size and magnificence—when it is finished! Funds have given out, however, and as a nun said to me with a whimsical smile, "Food is more important." Hence it looks forlorn in its scaffolding and half-finished majesty, the abode of bats and owls.

But a treat was in store for us. We had been bidden to a choir practice and only those who have heard the Russian choirs can gauge the fulness of what awaited us. Naturally we had often heard the singing in the Orthodox Churches where, however, the voices are exclusively those of men and boys. Hence a female choir was a novelty to us, and we were dubious whether they or anything human could surpass the glorious tones of those double basses which vibrate like the low notes of an organ, and have made the singing of the Russian Church an unsurpassed standard throughout the world.

The results exceeded our most sanguine expectations. In a room, bare of all furniture, except a few chairs and a small organ, were gathered half a hundred nuns,—a study in themselves. At the organ sat their master, a mere man!! He struck a few opening chords when out of the silence arose a solemn cadence of harmony, infinitely soothing, marvellously touching and deeply satisfying. The world, its worries, its garishness and its pettiness melted away like mist before the morning sun; one was lifted upwards, ever upwards, and all things



CONVENT OF ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST. NEW CHURCH IN COURSE OF CONSTRUCTION.

VERCHOTURIE. A "NOVICE" IN THE CONVENT.

To face p. 116.

merged into a great forgetfulness. But no; incomparable harmony as it seemed to us, it was insufficient to satisfy the demands of the teacher. Again and again he made them repeat a phrase, and though each attempt seemed impossible of betterment yet every time the ear could detect a fresh blending of voice into voice, until, with a final triumphant burst, the whole choir broke forth with absolute unison, swelling and dying away with every inflexion of entreaty and supplication; a human instrument vibrating with a depth of feeling that no organ, fruit of man's genius, could ever hope to equal.

And so, with a bow to the Abbess, we passed out again into the warm evening sunshine and as we looked at the great massive skeleton of the church to be, we registered a vow that, were we spared, in days to come we would again visit this convent when the good nuns should be singing in the home of their hearts' desires.

Many a handshake was our portion as we made our adieux; it is impossible to translate with a pen upon cold paper the earnestness which we felt underlay the wishes for our safety and happiness. It is this spontaneous openness of heart, which is so often to be met with in the Russian, which makes for so much charm in the individual. Contaminate him by foreign and alien influences and he may degenerate; but the country-bred man or woman, the untutored child of nature, brims over with an uncontrollable love for his fellow-creatures rendering him one of the most pliable of vessels for the nation's greatness.

All religious of all religions, in a greater or lesser degree, are beggars. Some may ask from the

pulpit, some through the Press, and others may approach one on paper. But all want money for the advancement of their schemes, and since these schemes are for the betterment of mankind, who shall blame them? The Russian nuns are no exception to this rule, though I am bound to admit that they are satisfied with the absolute minimum in the coin of the realm. They will thank you for a single kopeck with all the fervour they would bestow upon the donor of a rouble, and therein, perhaps, lies their success. They are wonderful people, probably the only folk in the world who can extract money from beggars. This may sound monstrous, but it must be pointed out that the Russian beggar is often a capitalist in disguise.

I recall once in Kief giving a particularly disreputable-looking member of this class a fifty-kopeck piece. I remember also my friends' amusement when they had remonstrated with me and I had said something in a self-satisfied way about it being more blessed to give than to receive. "No doubt," they said, "we agree with you, only that villain owns six houses and could buy you up five times over." Hence I am beginning to think that these nuns are, after all, gifted with considerable perspicacity.

Happy were our evenings in this quaint old town. The river-bank is the town promenade, a promenade any place might envy, few can equal and none can surpass. On the one side, the softly flowing stream, plain, pine trees and distance. On the other, church after church, the rosy-pink crenellated church of St. Vladimir; the striking, rococo-like edifice of St. Barbara,—much loved and most revered of Russian saints,—and the delicate tracery which

makes of the Church of the Trinity a building which, in the half-light of a dying day, fills the mind with the glamour of romance and tinges the heart with a shade of sadness for the forgotten past.

Time passes smoothly and easily at Veliki Ustjug. The interest in our presence perceptibly waned, and we were on the way to being adopted into the regular life of the little place when the time came for us to move onwards into other fields. I shall long remember my friend the telegraph-clerk who handled my telegram to Petrograd giving a fresh address. I suggested that I should like it sent "srochnie" (express), which means that it takes precedence of all ordinary messages whilst, for that privilege, the normal tariff is trebled.

"What a deplorable waste of money!" he remarked. "No, Barin, I really cannot allow you to do it. I am sure you cannot afford it and in the ordinary way this message will be in Petrograd to-morrow morning. What more do you want?"

So my message went through the ordinary channels and I was saved five roubles. I suppose in any other country a remark such as the above would savour of unjustifiable presumption or else of direct impertinence. But there is a something, a genial familiarity, withal respectful about these people which differentiates them from all others I have encountered. And therein lies the charm awaiting the traveller off the beaten track and him who eschews the big centres of population of modern Russia. As in Veliki Ustjug, he will experience all the charm of a genial hospitality and if at moments the curiosity is a trifle overpowering, it is in reality a testimony to the innate belief that the foreigner must have something worth imitation

and worth study, since these children of nature have not as yet learnt that all is dross and vanity which does not accord with the virtue and practice of simplicity. That is the keynote of their character, a simplicity which knows no self-consciousness, and which silhouettes in bold detail the soul of the individual ego.

Presumably the time will come when transport facilities will open up the road to Veliki Ustjug, when the enterprising hotel proprietor will blossom forth in the Street of the Trinity with a red-brick horror of countless rooms, and when the railway station will be replete with taxi-cabs and gold-bedecked interpreters. Those, no doubt, will be days of material prosperity for the town; all will benefit in some direct way,—priests, people, nuns, beggars, even my good friend Simeonovitch and his brood,—though I fancy the latter may have his regrets. Life is so easy now, it flows, or rather meanders like its prototype the River Suchona. Time is irrelevant, eternity stands still, empires may rise, sway and fall, but Ustjug remains untouched, unmoved, a pearl in the diadem of mighty Mother Russia. And those of her children to whom she did not give birth, those step-children from other lands who look towards her, remember her and revere her, to those she speaks when the wind whispers in the trees, when the brook kisses the pebbles of its bed, when the sun sinks glowingly in the west and the autumn evenings grow cold with the promise of winter.

CHAPTER VII

VIATKA : A PEASANT PROVINCE

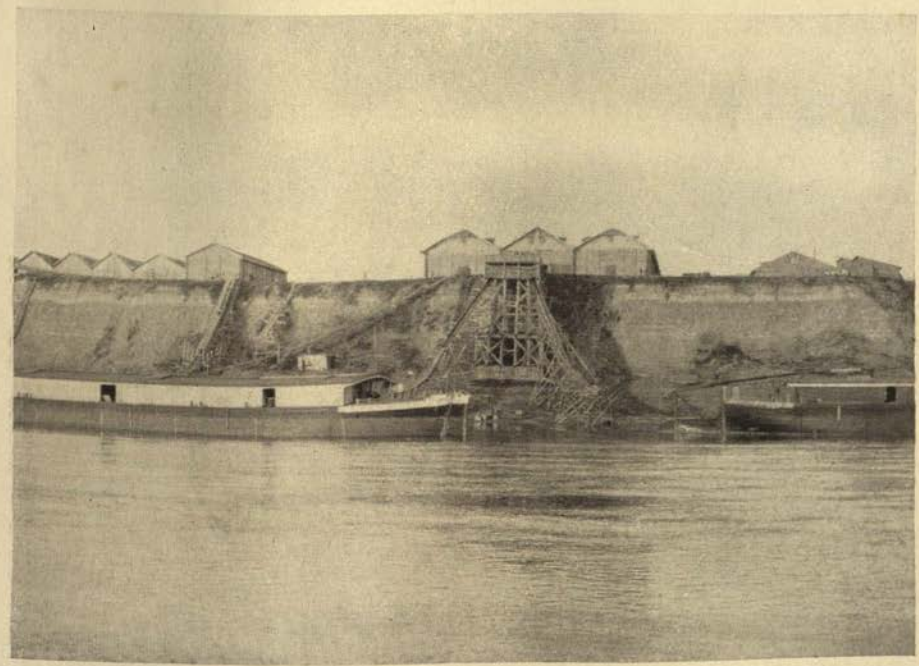
FROM time immemorial Russia has always been pictorially represented by snow-covered cottages, a gaunt pine tree or two standing out in the surrounding solitude like sentries and a general atmosphere of cold desolation. Yet, as we found to our discomfort, the sun shines upon the Northern Russian plains during at least five months in the year with an intensity which is slightly disconcerting. One might almost believe that were there an old man in the sun as there is represented to be in the moon, he was amusing himself by turning on his West African strength to see how the good Russians would like it. The thermometer was standing at 105° Fahrenheit as we caught our first glimpse of Kotlass. There was a glaring sun-swept river-bank, ugly in its sandy bareness and rendered still uglier by a number of spider-like excrescences which looked as though they had been fashioned from discarded kerosene tins. These were grain shoots!! Had the picture included an odd palm tree and a few grinning niggers the scene might well have been laid in the tropics.

There is nothing romantic about Kotlass. It is meant to be severely utilitarian but, like so many things in Russia, country of paradox, the conveniences inseparable from intelligent utilitarianism

appear to have been carefully eliminated while the drawbacks are blatantly positive. The wharf was an agitated maelstrom; a seething, struggling mass of good-natured, highly scented humanity. The genial moujik thinks nothing of carrying over his shoulders a sack containing the family bedding plus any spare apparel which may be considered necessary. In addition there will be slung about him the inevitable tea-kettle, not improbably a saucepan, a handkerchief containing a large loaf of black bread, some sausage and a cucumber, while in his left hand he will have a stout staff. Being wedged in a crowd of this composition requires patience and everything must be taken in good part. Moreover we were sinners ourselves. In spite of cutting and contriving, in spite of forethought and self-denial, we owned to the possession of nineteen separate and distinct pieces of luggage. True, many of them were small, but a camera-case always appears endowed with the malevolent desire to insert itself where it is not wanted, while as for a large Thermos flask and a birch-bark basket from Archangel, which, Russian-like, contained our tea and certain provisions—words fail me.

We accosted a moujik and asked him whether he could find us a droshky. "There is not one in the town, Barin," he replied. "How far is it to the station?" we queried. With deliberation he shelled and ate a number of sunflower seeds with the skill of a parrot, and then said, "A matter of a verst. There is no road; it's over there," pointing vaguely with his hand. "Are there any nosilchiki?" (porters) we asked. No!! They were also unknown at Kotlass, this humming commercial centre. But after some persuasion and a promise of a rouble,

NORTHERN DWINA. GRAIN BARGES AND TUG.



NORTHERN DWINA. KOTLASS GRAIN SHOOTS.

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our friend in question volunteered to act as a substitute.

The station of Kotlass is an excellent jumping off place into the unknown. It looks as if it had been dropped there by accident, and as though its mission in life was anything but that connected with the care, comfort and transport of passengers. There is only one train daily, and that leaves at the cheery hour of two in the morning. Why it leaves at that time we could never discover, and it is a riddle which even the Russian officials themselves have never been able to solve. It certainly connects with no other train anywhere, and arrival at its destination, Viatka, heralds a delay of at least four hours for its unfortunate occupants, no matter whither they may be bound. But then this is one of the features of travel in the remoter parts of Russia. Trains nearly always start between midnight and four in the morning, providing the refreshment buffets with considerable business and offering to the stranger a varied vista of sleeping humanity.

It is quite wonderful how the Russian can accommodate himself to the circumstances of the moment when travelling. Imagine a large room with at one end a "zakouski" (*hors-d'œuvres*) counter, a neat row of vodka glasses and a hissing samovar. The rest of the room is occupied by perhaps two long tables capable of accommodating some forty persons each, and a number of little tables to seat four and even two. The atmosphere is none too good; those persons awake smoke incessantly. But the majority are in the land of dreams. They lie sprawled out with their heads on their arms, which latter are stretched on the table

to form some sort of pillow. Snorts, snores, groans and occasional emphatic remarks anent the hardness of the furniture alone break the silence. There are all classes; an officer in a smart cavalry regiment, a *commis voyageur* with a sample bag as a pillow, a forester in a green tunic with brass buttons,—evidently sleeping away a plenitude of beer,—and an old peasant woman with a baby in her arms who, at intervals, masticates a bit of sausage before transferring it on to her charge. It is a study of life unrelieved by those conventions which go to make up so-called civilisation, since sleep and fatigue are great levellers,—the greatest of all levellers except death.

Outside, the same picture is repeated, only in different form. Here the pilgrim, the peasant, the wanderer from afar and the tramp lie in their sheepskin "shubas" upon the hard, uncovered benches of the waiting-room and dream away the long hours in blissful unconsciousness. To him who would study human nature unadorned, first-hand, I would recommend a four hours' stay in such a waiting-room as I have described. And, incidentally, he would learn much of the moujik which would both surprise and please him. There is an elemental love of humanity inbred in the latter's nature which renders the "duty towards one's neighbour" familiar to most of us in the Catechism, as outlined therein, quite superfluous.

There is also a subtle irony about the station clock. Throughout the Russian Empire there is only one official time by which the trains are worked,—that of Petrograd. Thus 2 a.m. Petrograd time may represent 10 p.m. or 5 a.m. local time. Hence all station clocks have two sets of hands, red

and black, and the amount of confusion that ensues is not only a test of temper but a test of the quality of one's watch, if one makes the futile error of altering it. I have met many merchants who travel with two watches, one for official and one for local time, and I met one gentleman who boasted of three, the third being used for "train time," which is arbitrary over certain sections of the route. Thus Omsk local time carries the Trans-Siberian railway westwards as far as Perm, though the difference of local time between the two places is probably about two hours. After a certain point this question becomes quite a fascinating one, and to those possessed of a sense of humour it may be turned into something of a game. And, after all, since most emphatically time is not money in Russia, and since, moreover, everyone allows the margin of an hour or two for the catching of a train, no great harm is done. In fact, ought one not to be grateful to the philanthropy of the individual who devised such an excellent topic of conversation ?

In another chapter I have made serious mention of Kotlass as a river port, and hence I do not propose to refer again to that aspect. At the same time it would be interesting to see what the compiler of one of those gushing guide-books, so popular with a certain class of the travelling public, would find to say about this quasi port. During the summer months it houses a considerable population, grain or timber merchants, longshoremen, bargees and other river riff-raff. The first-mentioned form a varied collection of all nationalities; Jews there are in abundance and wealthy ones at that, though at the time of our visit the German influence and tongue predominated. There are no roads, the town

having grown without any attempt at systematic planning. There is no hotel, no restaurant except the railway buffet, no furnished rooms and no doctor. If a merchant is obliged to spend one week there for the transaction of business he is compelled to take a furnished house for the entire season at an exorbitant rental. But there is a cinema. All good Russian towns have cinemas, Moscow easily holding the world's record in that direction.

Under these conditions we felt no regret at saying good-bye to Kotlass. Much to the indignation of a forestry official who evidently had an extreme sense of his own importance, and thanks to the courtesy of the station-master, we were permitted with our nineteen pieces of baggage to board the train on the siding and thus escaped the hopeless weariness of seven hours in the railway buffet.

Between Kotlass and Viatka the country offers no particular features. Hour after hour the train jolts along through everlasting pine forests interspersed with only occasional stretches of cultivated land. It is a very deserted line, that is from a passenger point of view, boasting of only one buffet, which was reached at six in the morning and which we missed, and since the train did not arrive at Viatka until four in the afternoon we should have fared badly had it not been for a kindly Russian who gave us wild strawberries, bread and cheese.

It always seems to me that places, like people, have personalities. At first glance one feels that a town is sympathetic, repellent or lacking in magnetism. Viatka reminded me of a good-natured, frowsy boarding-house keeper, one of the type who lives in

her dressing-gown, ornaments her head with eternal curling-pins and does not frequently trouble the bathroom. Even for Russia, there was an air of *laissez-faire* at the station of Viatka which was vaguely irritating. On the rank outside there were only two cabs, both the drivers of which had long since gone to sleep, and it necessitated Herculean efforts and much objurgation to stir them up sufficiently to render us the great honour of driving us to the town ! !

In one of these cabs was stowed, as securely as might be, the heavy baggage, while the other, occupied by ourselves, required careful balancing, owing to a broken spring. The heavier member of the party sat huddled up in one corner whilst the lighter was completely barricaded with the smaller effects in order to equalise, as far as possible, the weight. And then began our *viâ dolorosa.*

Our isvoschik was at last thoroughly awake, and having discovered that we were foreigners beamed upon us. He was an enormously fat man, with the pinkest of pink faces fringed with wisps of ginger-coloured hair. When we commented upon the combined weight of himself, the heavier member of the party, who confesses to turning the scale at thirteen stone, plus the lighter member, plus the baggage, being too heavy a load for a conveyance such as his even with sound springs, let alone with a broken one, he, with majestic contempt, answered, "Nichevo." (That doesn't matter.) "You will see." And we did.

From the station to the town is a distance of about six versts and he must have accomplished a record that day. There were ruts in that road, there were holes in that road, there were stones of half a

hundredweight plentifully besprinkled at intervals along that road, and over all these obstacles we charged unheeding. It was in vain we screamed our protests, perhaps they never rose clearly above the din. All that we ourselves could hear was the self-satisfied "Xorosho, Xorosho" (All right, all right) of the driver, who would turn bodily round in his seat to see how much we were outdistancing the other cab.

Elsewhere I mentioned the theme of the Vologda Governor's address to his subordinates, "Make boulevards." I should like to tender the same counsel with the modification of "roads" to the Governor of Viatka Province.

I was never obliged to alter my first impression of Viatka. It is straggling, unkempt, and yet neither wholly unpicturesque nor unfriendly. It is an ancient city, in fact one of the most ancient of this northern region. But the zeal of the reformer in the shape of the municipal architect has not been a conspicuous success. American town-planning may be excellent when dealing with a city in embryo, but when applied to a creation of the period of Ivan the Terrible, it is liable to do more harm than good. Theoretically, the streets are supposed to run parallel and at right angles; practically, they adhere to this only where they intersect, the remainder of the road sagging at intervals as though overcome by the effort.

Most of the thoroughfares are lined with booths which are quite a feature of the town and which lend to it something of an Oriental aspect. Generally kept by Jews, they form the favourite marketing place of the people. Their stock-in-trade varies from cheap boots and shoes to the crudest of crude

VIATKA. "SMOKING."

VIATKA. "OLD CLOTHES MAN."

The ladies have just been involved in a heated argument.

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toys, gaudy glass beads, sunflower seeds and dried fish. Rightly or wrongly, I gained the impression that Viatka paid too much attention to vodka. Nowhere else in Russia did I encounter so many drunken moujiks or see evidence of so much drunkenness early in the day. One must remember that Viatka is purely a peasant province, that the moujik in these parts works hard and successfully, and on the rare occasions that he comes into the town may be pardoned for going on the spree. But it seemed to me that there was a bad atmosphere in the place, and the clean sweep of the vodka shops will nowhere accomplish work of greater value.

The only building of any interest is the cathedral of Alexander Nevsky, which, from a constructive point of view, is something of a departure from conventional Russian ecclesiastical architecture. In fact, it might easily be taken for a mosque. Standing on a slight eminence on the outskirts of the town, it has a fine appearance from a distance, though closer examination is disappointing. It is surrounded by what was once a garden, now overgrown with weeds and a tangle of long, rank grass; untidy, uncared for, unlovely.

There is also an old cathedral situated in the heart of the town and reached by a long dim cloister which reminds one more of Italy than of Russia. Within, the effect, as we happened to see it, was peculiarly soft and rich. It was due neither to ikonostase nor to ikons; these were nothing out of the ordinary though the haloes of the saints were decorated with some fine specimens of old enamel. Rather was it due to the priest who was intoning a litany, a group of women who were joining in with the responses,

and the carpets. Probably in their first youth these latter had been a hard, glaring red, but time had accomplished its task gracefully, and they had now deepened into the mellowest of old rose. The women were likewise in red, that is to say, red was the *motif* of their attire ; a red kerchief, maybe, or a bodice or a petticoat, and some of them, over their shoulders, carried great bundles. Who knows—they may have been pilgrims *en route* to some distant shrine. Finally there was the priest, a tall, slender, handsome man with a wonderful carriage, who, as he intoned verse by verse in his rolling deep bass, tossed his long black locks like some swimmer who, emerging from the water, shakes the drops from his head, refreshed. His vestment was of some jade-green material interwoven with silver, while his stole was of an old blue brocade. The whole blended together, forming a picture so restful, so harmonious and so touched with the fragrance of devotion that it will long linger in our memory.

As in all Russian towns of moderate size Viatka is possessed of a club which, standing on a bluff overlooking a river of the same name, affords a fine view of the surrounding country. There is an immensity of depth about these Russian views which is unforgettable ; mile upon mile of forest and plain embodying every conceivable shade of green and brown until the tops of the furthest trees melt gradually into the grey-blue of the horizon. In the foreground lies the river winding its leisurely way between low, sloping shores dotted with horses and cattle, while puffing tugs and slow-moving timber rafts drifting with the current are the only spots of movement in all the vastness. Russian landscape is, nearly always, essentially restful. It invites contem-

VIATKA. THE NEW CATHEDRAL.

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plation. It appears as though far removed from the insistence of modern life. It suggests introspection which, in some natures, may quickly become tinged with morbidity. He who would understand Russian thought, the philosophy of her wise men and the errors of her extremists must first learn of its essence through the medium of those dreamy distances. But to return to the commonplace.

Russian hospitality is proverbial, and since, generally speaking, local hotels are somewhat mediocre in their accommodation, we were at once invited to use the club as long as we were in the city. Needless to say, we availed ourselves of the invitation with alacrity, for, apart altogether from creature comfort, there is an intimacy about club life which is unknown in public restaurants. The Russian in his domestic arrangements is intensely conservative, and the foreigner, unless he has lived for some period in a Russian town, rarely receives the entrée into his home. Again and again have I met Englishmen who have lived ten or twelve years in the same place, and have not possessed a single Russian intimate. This may, in part, be due to British clannishness, but on the other hand, whilst the Russian is ever ready to extend hospitality of a casual nature, whilst he will dine you and wine you at hotel and restaurant, he will seldom admit you to his family circle.

The club at Viatka was somewhat unique. Since foreigners were few and far between they were regarded rather in the nature of honoured guests, and the welcome extended to us carried with it more than a touch of cordial unconventionality. And thus it came about that we were bidden to a dance, a monthly affair, which was extremely popular with

the young men and maidens of the town. The dance was given in the club, which possessed a large, wood-panelled ballroom with a musicians' gallery. What the orchestra lacked in execution was made up by the enthusiasm and determination of its members, for fate ordained that during the whole of the evening there should be raging outside one of the most tremendous thunderstorms ever experienced in that neighbourhood. But the musicians rose to the occasion, and above salvoes of thunder which sounded like the booming of massed artillery, they succeeded in making themselves heard.

The dancers were chiefly girls from the local "Gymnasium," and male students who, in Russia, always wear a uniform of some sort. As for the former, in age they ranged from ten to twenty years, and it was amusing to watch the precociousness of the younger ones,—a precocity of a perfectly innocent nature and born of an absolute forgetfulness of self. They trooped in wearing white pinafores over pretty frocks of bright colours and began a sort of impromptu grand march round the room in twos and threes with linked arms. As soon as the music struck up they lost no time in joining the dance, and skill rather than sex appeared to govern the choice of partners. The belle of the ball was undoubtedly a tall girl in white with a small straw hat pulled down over an impertinent snub nose and with a mass of dead-black hair. Her little tanned hands were gloveless and her immature slim arms were bare from above the elbow. Her gestures were most graceful and unstudied as she advanced, retreated, allured and disdained, every thought concentrated on the dance.

The Russians are natural dancers, no amount of

instruction could ever instil into a human being the inherent grace which is their birthright. There is a gulf fixed between the dancing one sees in a London ballroom,—as often as not wooden and unrhythmical,—and the poetry of movement common to the Russians, which contains just that tinge of diablerie to make of it a living, vibrating joy. The most popular dances are the schottische, mazurka and gavotte, which afford endless opportunity for gestures, facial expression and intricate steps. "Do not disdain me," is the attitude of the young man. "I do not like you," reads that of the maiden. "Try," he implores. "Perhaps," she answers, then, "I am not sure." Their hands, eyes and swaying bodies tell the tale as clearly as spoken words.

I shall never forget the look of comic disgust which crossed the countenance of an aged onlooker when I blunderingly asked, "And do you dance the Tango here?" "Good heavens, no," was the reply. "You don't mean to say that you dance a thing like that in England?" Rather shamefacedly I had to admit the soft impeachment, when my interlocutor continued, "Cake-walks and all these modern so-called dances are not dances as we understand the word. Our girls would never be allowed to practise them."

Meantime, in an adjoining room supper was being served, and the "zakouski" buffet was being well patronised. Russians keep late hours from earliest childhood, hence there was nothing surprising in the number of family parties which included quite little tots, five or six years of age. But one incident there was which supplied us with food for thought. A young student of rather effeminate type had patronised the vodka carafe too freely, and his request for more

was politely refused. In vain he appealed to the bar tender who was good-naturedly adamantine. He then turned to the members of a card-party, men of a certain age, but received no assistance from that quarter. Then he lost his temper. A fellow-student tried to induce him to leave the bar, to no avail. Something of a wrangle ensued and behold! The lad suddenly produced a pistol. What his intentions were, I know not; also the weapon did not appear to be of a very dangerous type. But what was illuminating was the attitude of those present. True, a mother with two little children hastily moved to a more distant table, but otherwise there was no commotion. The lad was quickly disarmed and by way of cooling his head, two of his companions led him outside, where the downpour of rain acted as efficaciously as a pump. Within, the incident caused merely slight amusement. The pretty girl contemptuously shrugged her shoulders and unconcernedly continued dancing. The card-players said to each other, "Young fool," and absorbed themselves once more in the intricacies of "Vint,"—a complicated form of auction bridge,—and things resumed their normal course.

The incident, however, served to endorse the dictum of many strangers we had met, namely, that there is an insufficiency of that particular discipline among Russia's youth which leads to proper balance and the formation of strength of character. As I have elsewhere pointed out, nowhere else in the world are to be found lads whose mentality matures as quickly as those of Russia. Their absorbent powers are startling in their intensity, and the transition from boyhood into quasi-manhood may be compared to the unheralded leap from winter into summer in their own

country. With the utmost of composure they will ape the manners of grown-ups. At the age of fourteen or fifteen, when most boys should be occupied with their Latin and their games, when the playground, the school and the home should bound their horizon, many of these infant prodigies are already prepared to give their opinions upon profound political questions, to quote Hegel, Schopenhauer and Kant as evidence against the Orthodox Church and have already awakened to sex influence. That, in addition, the "café chantant" and the "zakouski" bar play their part in the further education of these youths goes without saying. Happily, during the war and for all time, the influence of vodka has been removed, and perhaps, with the coming peace and with the new spirit which is already in evidence, some change will occur in the training of the youth of the empire. So much for the growing manhood; its possibilities are unbounded.

In its very eagerness to emerge from the chrysalis of adolescence and to grapple with the multitudinous problems which make the sum of modern life, those problems so intimately associated with the betterment and happiness of the human race, —well, lovers of Russia can discern great promise of the future from those characteristics.

As for young womanhood, it is even more eager to learn, more receptive and more zealous than the other sex. The amount of information absorbed by these young minds is bewildering. They will be familiar with the philosophy of Rousseau, the psychology of William James, the doctrines of Tolstoy and the subversive morality of Bernard Shaw. Their heroes are of a type not usually known

to the *jeune fille* and the history of the beautiful and frail Tarnovska, who atoned for her misdeeds in a Venetian prison, arouses their unbounded enthusiasm and admiration. I remember one young lady of my acquaintance who, when I asked her the name of her favourite book, gave me the astonishing answer, "*Dr. Jeykell and Mr. Guide*, by that dear Stevanson!" (There is no "H" in the Russian language,—hence the Mr. *G*uide.)

The province of Viatka is noticeable in that, like its neighbour Archangel, it is a peasant community pure and simple. The bane of the great landlord, if bane it were, has ever been unknown; "Serfdom" has spelt nothing to these sturdy sons of the soil, and the nearest approach to anything in the nature of social domination has been that exercised by the great monastic institutions which stud the whole of this area. It would appear that the monks have at times been hard taskmasters and have had a keen eye on the main chance, but on the whole they have proved a blessing and not a blight, and the lot of the moujik in Northern Russia has not only been tolerable but, judged by comparative standards, has been even better than that of the great mass of agricultural labourers in Western Europe.

Towards this happy state of affairs the "Kustarnie" industry has lent notable aid. In their origin these peasant commodities were the result of the labours of the moujik who was employed nominally on the land, but who, in his leisure time, lent a helping hand towards supplying the hundred and one necessaries of village life which distance and transport difficulties prevented being obtained by any other manner. No doubt, at first, everything fashioned was strictly utilitarian, from the cloth

with which to clothe themselves to the spoons with which they ate their cabbage soup. But as time passed the market widened and families found it profitable to make for others ; then the middle-man from afar appeared and gradually was evolved this system of home employment which in the 'fifties of the nineteenth century reached its zenith. " Kustarnie Artels " (Peasant Associations) competed with the manufacturers, and competed successfully, especially in the line of textiles, weaving and the printing of linen and chintz (*vide* Mavor, *Economic History of Russia*). The movement was a national one and every province of the empire supported it to a greater or a lesser degree, whilst, in addition, during the days of serfdom the landowners in notable instances encouraged it by every means within their power.

During the long winter months when field work was impossible, it formed a valuable stand-by ; every conceivable article of daily use came within range of the industry and cleverness of these peasants, and even the children would take their share of the business, proving a by no means unimportant cog in the whole machine. The scheme was inelastic, however, in some degree ; a whole family would confine their attentions to a certain detail of manufacture which in its turn would link up with some other portion of the same article fashioned by another family, whilst the finished whole would come from another village in the district. Thus it came about that certain districts devoted themselves exclusively to special lines of manufacture, and thus it is that to-day Viatka stands pre-eminent for its joinery and woodwork.

But to return to the chronological order of things, after the 'fifties of the last century a period of commercial and economic depression was ushered into Russia and the first to feel the effects were the Kustarnie workers.* They were a disorganised body and, of course, at that time anything in the nature of a trades union was anathema; in point of fact, it was only just filtering into the minds of the more enlightened workmen as a fascinating and alluring possibility. Hence it was that until a comparatively recent date these industries had grown so inelastic in their methods as to become almost non-existent from sheer inanition. About twenty years ago, however, a new state of affairs commenced, and the local Zemstvos (Councils) aided by state and philanthropic help took the whole question seriously in hand with immensely encouraging results. The most pressing need was the elimination of the middle-man, which is being accomplished gradually by the establishment of depôts for the exhibit and sale of Kustarnie work at central points in Russia and even abroad, the direct supply of the necessary raw material naturally much cheapening production and the facilitating of the formation of fresh artels. That the Government is very much in earnest may be judged by the fact that according to the *Russian Year Book*, 1914 edition, the Ministry of Agriculture possesses a special department of experts in Kustarnie work, has twelve thousand technical schools, publishes albums of drawings and designs, organises exhibitions and, in certain cases where Government contracts are concerned, acts as intermediary between Zemstvos and the departments interested. During 1913 it is estimated that

* Vide Mavor, *Economic History of Russia*, Vol. II.

this department advanced over a million and a half roubles towards the development of these industries.

Coming now more particularly to the Viatka Province, from the same source I find that during 1912 the local Zemstvos spent one hundred thousand roubles upon the encouragement of fresh initiative, whilst loaning over forty thousand roubles to special organisations. A creditable piece of work, surely, when it is remembered that this is the smallest province in European Russia and probably one of the poorest, since there are no big towns and no mines or commercial undertakings of any magnitude other than those already mentioned.

And it is impossible to look at the handiwork of these peasants without feeling that one is standing in the presence of the material creation of innate artists. These are no book-made workmen, but artists by perception. Even in the simpler and commoner products such as cigar-boxes and cigarette-cases, there is such exquisite finish that one can but realise that in a sense it must have been a labour far removed from that necessary toil wherewith to buy bread. In their religious work, as manifested by crucifixes, wooden ikonostases, etc., this naturally lends itself to deeper expression and in every instance, and we examined several hundreds of examples, it was never lacking. When one has seen and when one has reflected, one marvels at what these humble workers might develop into, given the opportunities they so richly deserve and which the " New Russia " will most assuredly afford them as it becomes feasible.

CHAPTER VIII

PERM AND THE UPPER REACHES OF THE KAMA

SEEN from the River Kama, Perm at first sight strikes the eye as a fine city. Standing on a series of rolling hills it has a distinctly opulent air. One notices well-built houses framed in luxuriant foliage, crowded quays where river steamers are busy loading or discharging their cargoes and the ancient Cathedral of the Ascension which, whatever it may lack in structural beauty, dates back to the bad old days when Perm was an outpost against aggression from the other side of the Urals. But from within, its charms are not so manifest, and the long three-mile drive from the station to the interior of the town merely serves to expose the hollowness of its pretensions. Perm really consists of one very long and, in summer, very dusty street from which radiate those smaller thoroughfares which serve to exaggerate its importance as a great centre of population. As a matter of fact its citizens number under fifty thousand.

Without doubt there is not much here to attract the visitor and the *raison d'être* of our including it in our itinerary was merely that it happened to be on the line of least resistance towards the upper reaches of the Kama whither we were bound. Yet to those who have eyes to see no city can be quite undistinctive. Some sidelight is certain to illumin-

ate the dullest experience and to those who are receptive of impressions the smallest incident may serve to open up a subject apparently unconnected in any way with the time or place. And so it was with us; from a week in Perm we learnt a number of lessons which otherwise we might have missed.

In the first place we were fortunate, thanks to the good offices of a friend, in obtaining permission to stay at the Klubnie Nomera, or rooms reserved for members of the local club. The apartment assigned to us was scrupulously clean and most magnificent. Its magnificence consisted in an immoderate use of red plush and gold, plus the presence of no less than fourteen gilded tabourets, which were of uncertain equilibrium and apparently served no useful purpose. This eccentricity of furniture, which is rather common in provincial Russia, I have mentioned elsewhere. Probably it arises from a scarcity of really useful articles coupled with a determination to make the best of what is available. Our meals were taken in the excellent club restaurant to which was attached a garden where usually every evening a military band played. Thus, temporarily, we were in clover, and who shall say that creature comforts have not their influence upon one's mental impressions ?

Perm is the administrative centre of the province of that name, one of the largest and most important, from a financial and mining standpoint, in Russia. It belongs essentially to the Urals since it extends both east and west of these mountains and embraces territory as far removed as the town of Ekaterinburg. Incidentally also, and this fact may help to bring about a realisation of Russia's untapped timber resources, out of an area of

290,370 square versts (approximately 130,000 square miles) three-quarters is registered as forest-land.

One hears a great deal about the administrative magnificence with which official Russia surrounds itself. Of course, such descriptions are overdrawn and hopelessly out of perspective, but none the less they obtain credence. Yet here at Perm, capital of the third biggest province in European Russia, Government House is merely a simple two-story structure standing in a decent-sized garden. It would certainly cause no comment in a suburb like Surbiton and is chiefly conspicuous by its inconspicuousness.

Quite a distinctive feature in the town is the curious fretwork ornamentation of its houses. The more wealthy the owner the more of this peculiar and not over-beautiful decoration which renders a building not unlike the houses one sees on a sugar-cake and associates with stories of the Hansel and Gretel type.

Probably owing to the easy river communication with Kazan, this is quite a Tartar stronghold. If a Jew is a born financier then the Tartar is a born grocer. One can find Tartar shops of this kind in every village almost from the White Sea to the Pacific. But at Perm they have extended their energies and control most of the large establishments of all descriptions.

There is also an immense market devoted nearly in its entirety to hardware with a sprinkling of ready-made clothing. There is a certain fascination in this hardware since it consists of the most extraordinary miscellany imaginable. An old lady tried her hardest to induce me to buy some dolls' eyes of which she had a couple of score, while a

PERM. TYPICAL HOUSE.
Note the fretwork.

EKATERINBURG. THE BASKET AND TUB MARKET.

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man ran after me in great excitement, seeing that I had a camera, to show me an old weather-worn photographic printing-frame which he persisted would be most useful to me. Probably business is not taken too seriously here. I noticed one fat old fellow, a dealer evidently in scrap iron, who had gone fast asleep in the scales he used for measuring his stock-in-trade.

I must not forget the dog; true, he did not belong to the market, his owner being a waiter at the railway-station buffet, but it certainly was a remarkable beast. One hears people saying that So-and-so has a "nose for money," merely a metaphor, of course, but as applied to this dog it was an actual fact. Nothing attracted it like the sight of a silver rouble or some lesser coin, not even an inviting morsel of meat. It would whine for a coin with far greater persistence than any human beggar, and we watched it for nearly an hour trying to get a five-kopeck piece which had rolled under a cigarette cabinet. I expect his master was a bit of a rascal but he certainly was possessed of a sense of humour. "Yes, Barin," he said to us, when we expressed our surprise at the cleverness of the animal, "he is a very good dog. Do you know what he did the other day? He poked about amongst a lot of sleeping moujiks who were waiting for their train, and he found a wallet with twenty-two roubles in it which, naturally, he brought to me. Well, what was I to do? The station was crowded and I was very busy and, besides, no one complained of any loss, so I took those roubles as a present from the good God. Yes," he concluded, as he patted the robber, "he's a very good dog and a very clever one, too."

On the Sunday I attended Mass at the Catholic

Church in Perm—a poor-looking, forlorn, dirty little place. In provincial Russia the Catholic churches are always Polish, and whatever they lose in comparison with their magnificent neighbours of the Orthodox faith, they make up in the enthusiasm of their congregation. They are always packed but, generally speaking, the worshippers are among the poorest of the poor. It is something of a miracle how the priests manage to exist, certainly their lot must be a hard one involving one long strain of self-denial physically, while mentally they must suffer from constant "heimweh." For the Pole belongs to the only nation which never really becomes acclimatised. One has merely to enter a Polish church in Siberia or elsewhere and the impression one gains is akin to a people wailing in their misery, whilst the sermons, always inordinately long, I have been told, habitually have for their theme, Patience.

There is something infinitely pathetic in the Pole's attachment to his creed. True, in their own country, speaking from personal experience, they are not sympathetic. The fire of their nationality ever burns so fiercely in spite of the splitting up of their Fatherland that they are egotistic, dogmatic and always on the defensive. They suffer under a perpetual grievance and are unwilling to acknowledge that any good can come out of any country except their own, and in this respect appear to the outsider ungrateful when sincere efforts are made to ameliorate their lot.

Russian rule in Poland may have had its drawbacks, there must ever be some slight irritation when the supreme government differs in word, speech and thought from the subject-race. But

certainly those Poles under Russian dominion are materially more prosperous than their brothers on German soil, who have had their language, as far as possible, suppressed and the commonest civil rights denied them. And it is the Church which has ever been their constant rallying-point. No matter what efforts have been made by administrative measures, in the past, to crush their national feeling, it has always been the Church which has intervened with its spiritual support and influence, and has rendered nugatory the proposals of man. Hence its great power over the people and the people's absolute devotion to the Church. Thus it follows that Catholicism, as understood in Russia, has not always been on the best of terms with the authorities and, in fact, has been regarded with considerable suspicion. But the war will alter all that. As I write the final issue still remains uncertain, but the Poles have again the chance of consolidating their nationality under the sovereignty of the Czar. One can but hope that they will profit by the lessons of the past and that the Church with its supreme authority will work for peace and a lasting understanding with Russia.

There is no reason why Orthodox and Catholic should not walk hand-in-hand supported by feelings of mutual respect and united sympathy. They have a common enemy, the German spirit of exaggerated material pretensions, which it is to both their interests to defeat. In justice to the Poles, hitherto it has left those of their countrymen under Teuton rule unmoved and cold, again thanks to the bulwark of Catholicism. But the danger of friction appears to arise from too great a tendency to differentiate between beliefs, each of which is

working towards a similar end, and to erect the one as a standard of opposition to the other. At all costs that must be avoided if there is to be a solid peace.

I remember talking with a Russian gentleman and we got on the question of Home Rule in Ireland. I ventured to say that the whole subject appeared to me to be so knotty that I did not believe a conclusion satisfactory to everybody would ever be found. "Ah," he said, "that reminds me of Poland; there are a great many points in common between the Irish and the Poles!!"

It so happened that while we were in Perm Admiral Sir David Beatty and his British Squadron were the guests of the Russian people at Kronstadt. The visit aroused the most tremendous enthusiasm, even in Governments like far-away Perm, where ninety per cent of the people have never seen the sea. And as soon as it was discovered that we were English the consideration shown to us became sometimes positively embarrassing. What, however, was astonishing and particularly pleasing was the grasp held by even the average provincial shopman of the basic principles underlying Anglo-Russian friendship.

There was a certain pastry-cook, from whom we used to purchase cakes, who was a great international politician. Our arrival on his premises was always the signal for a prolonged argument, in fact, "politics first, pastry afterwards." He was an Anglophile to the core. At great length and with considerable skill he would marshal what in his opinion were excellent reasons for the development of the *entente* into something stronger. "Russia wants exploiting," he would say, "she

PERM. THE RAILWAY STATION.

PERM. WAITING FOR THE TRAIN.

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wants opening up; railways, canals, irrigation schemes, mines and so on. We Russians can't do these things ourselves. It is not only money we want but someone to take the initiative and to lead where we can follow. That is where you English ought to come in, you have the reputation of being the most practical people in the world. Hitherto, and literally for centuries, it's always been the Germans and we're sick of them. Some day trouble will come and then we shall see what we shall see. They talk a lot about their army but we've got one also, and it has improved a good deal lately, so we're not frightened. And who knows? Perhaps we shan't be fighting alone. Now if England were with us, why there would be nothing to worry about. Let me recommend those cakes to the Barinya."

Now it must not be supposed that this anti-German feeling is anything rare or occasioned by some temporary friction. It permeates the entire country and has done so for years; it is no matter of personal antipathy, but rather of a growing, collective antagonism. Even the small tradesman resents the flood of German commercial travellers who foist upon him their wares, which wares he is forced to buy because other foreigners have not taken the trouble to come forward and explore the possibilities of the market. In this direction Russia has been curiously neglected and the Russian business man feels it keenly. Elsewhere I have gone into this question thoroughly, but in writing of Perm I could neither ignore nor forget my Anglophile pastry-cook.

Frankly, we were not sorry to leave Perm. Tremendous heat, clouds of dust, a perpetual wind

and the most aggressive of flies combined to render life unbearable. Hence, when the day arrived upon which the steamboat agent informed us there would be a boat for Tcherdin leaving at four in the afternoon, we were relieved. Knowing by this time the Russian peculiarity of arriving at a railway station or wharf an hour or more in advance of the time specified for departure, we were on the steamer pontoon shortly after three. It was blazingly hot and the sun seemed to eat its way through the corrugated zinc roof. Already quite a number of prospective passengers had assembled and the note was one of cheery optimism, something of the " Wait until we are on the steamer, it will be nice and cool there," sort of attitude.

The name of the steamer I have long since forgotten, but the name we christened her I shall never forget. We called her the " Skora Boudet," which may be said roughly to correspond to the " kommt gleich " of a German waiter when he knows that there is every prospect of half an hour's delay before the next course, and may be approximately translated into English by the expression, " It will be here in a minute."

After about an hour's wait we asked the pier-master when the boat for Tcherdin would come alongside. " Skora boudet," was the promising reply. At 4.30 apparently all the would-be passengers had arrived and the pontoon was beginning to wobble ominously when any craft bigger than a canoe passed. It was as though every intending traveller for the Upper Kama had brought down not only his father, his mother, his sisters and his brothers but his entire family tree in order to say good-bye. No one was in the least depressed

except ourselves and the cracking of sunflower seeds sounded like minor artillery. Again I ventured to ask the pier-master when we might expect the Tcherdin boat. His reply was, "Skora boudet, Gospodin, I have already told you so. Skora boudet."

I tried to point out that he had said precisely the same thing an hour and a half previously, but, what with welcoming old friends and making new ones, he was far too busy to give any further heed to the matter. Another hour passed. My wife, who up to this time had shown exemplary patience, now began to betray signs of a fraying temper. Her seat was not of the most comfortable, to be precise she had found sanctuary on a large coil of wire. This time it was the head stevedore to whom we made appeal. He was deeply sympathetic, shared the wire-heap with my wife and in most friendly fashion pointed out to her a steamer in the far distance which was apparently taking in wood for fuel. "There it is, that is the Tcherdin boat," he said. "Skora boudet." By 6.15 even Russia was awake. The charm of the sunflower seeds had gradually died away. An old woman with two parroquets which, for the moderate sum of a kopeck, gave you a complete and careful description of your future wife or husband, as the case might be, printed upon pink paper, had practically disposed of her wares and hence waiting had started to be tedious.

"And the ship, when does the ship come?" enquired a stout Tartar merchant of the perspiring pier-master.

"Skora boudet. Skora boudet," was the familiar answer given with an assurance which was positively uplifting in its encouragement.

And everybody took heart, craned their necks and said to each other, " Xorosho, skora boudet." (" Good, it is coming in a minute.")

By seven our tempers had completely evaporated; we did not believe that any steamer intended to make its appearance and we had passed the point of caring. As well return to the Klubnie Nomera and put in another week at Perm as wait for this phantom vessel. To add to our disgust we had discovered that the boat pointed out to us by the stevedore had nothing whatever to do with Tcherdin and was, in fact, a tug-boat going to Kazan. However, nineteen pieces of baggage form an argument difficult of solution, especially when all the cabs have been driven away because their drivers, in view of the many farewells which they heard taking place, imagined that the boat must be on the point of coming alongside. This must have been about 7.15.

At 7.30 we saw the stevedore again! In our best Russian we jointly pointed out to him that he was a liar, and that we thought it was a great pity that he had not been sent to the Island of Solovetz in perpetuity. All of which he took in the most perfect good humour, patted me on the shoulder, smiled blandly and said that, of course, he knew that the boat which was loading timber was a Kazan tug-boat, but that knowing " inostranie " (foreigners) were apt to be impatient, he had told us that it was going to Tcherdin in order that we might not lose heart. At 7.45, amidst a buzz of excitement, the " Skora Boudet " warped in alongside the pontoon.

She was a funny little steamer of the familiar paddle-wheel type, with her first-class accommoda-

TIUMEN A WATER-CARRIER.

GOROBLAGODATSKA. YOUNG RUSSIA.

There is really slight difference between Young Russia and Young England.

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tion forward on the upper deck. She was kept spotlessly clean, but the gentleman responsible for the upholstering of the cabins, with perverse ingenuity, had constructed berths which it required untold patience and a strong sense of humour to manipulate. In the first place they were covered with the most slippery of green American cloth, and in the second place a series of tremendously strong spiral springs formed the centre of the bed. The result was that to rest was next door to impossible, since neither sleeping sacks nor their occupants could remain on the berths for any length of time, but gracefully and easily were deposited on the floor.

It was nine that night before we finally got away and had an opportunity of sizing up our fellow-passengers. There was one delightful youth from Southern Russia, an engineering student, he told us, who sported one of the embroidered blouses common to the Ukraine and who played the piano superbly without the least trace of self-consciousness. There was a thin, severe-looking lady of the "Papa, potatoes, prunes and prism" type who seemed to be in a state of constant disapproval, and who, after throwing a shocked glance at an innocuous beer bottle, would bury herself in a French grammar. At first we thought she was a schoolmistress but later we found out that she was a doctor's wife.

Finally there were two remarkable characters, a father and son. The former, originally an ordinary moujik, had gradually amassed a large fortune and was reputed to be the richest man in the whole of this region. But, alas, whilst accomplishing a perfectly legitimate and indeed most laudable

action, he had lost even the manners of the moujik. He spat everywhere with the most complete impartiality, until we sent him a polite message by the one steward, suggesting that he might spare our particular portion of the dining-saloon. The son, when he was with papa, was a model of all the domestic virtues and, in addition, passed as both teetotaller and non-smoker. We commented upon this. But late our first evening on board we heard sounds of revelry proceeding from the second-class saloon and behold, there was the son with an empty vodka carafe in front of him, smoking a very large and very rank cigar ! !

Our trip up the Kama proved most interesting. Its scenery is always pleasant and in some places becomes almost grand. Great wooded heights command long stretches of the river upon which there is incessant movement. Immense timber rafts float lazily down on their way to the Volga. Sometimes they must be a quarter of a mile in length, and at their stern they will have a stoutly built log-house with plants in pots and a verandah with chairs and tables, a sort of floating beer garden. These are the houses of the owners. During the winter they fell the timber and stack it on the banks of convenient rivulets running into the head waters of the Kama, and as soon as the thaw comes they collect it, form the raft, build their house and travel downstream, maybe even as far as Astrakan. There they dispose of it and return to amass another year's supply. Between Tcherdin and Perm great efforts are made to keep the river navigable. In addition to buoys and lights marking the channel, there are some of the most powerful dredgers in the world constantly at work com-

bating the shifting sands. About 150 versts from Perm and about eight versts inland is the important town of Solikamsk. This is a very ancient settlement, dating back to 1400, at which time even it was famous in Russia, as it then existed, for its salt deposits. From that date down to the present day these deposits have been regularly worked. The salt is of a very coarse quality, but its value may be gauged from the fact that its sale takes it as far as the Petchora River and even to Archangel.

The "Skora Boudet" was true to her reputation throughout; in the first place circumstances made us over twelve hours late in sighting Tcherdin. I use the word sighting because that is what literally happened. We steamed round a bend and there, in the distance, perhaps two miles away, lay our goal. And at that precise moment we ran on a sandbank. As a rule one gets off with ease but on this occasion the "Skora Boudet" was obstinate. Then the fun began.

In Russia everybody has the right to give advice upon such matters and everybody did so. A boat was rowed ashore with a rope which was tied to a tree-stump, and the capstan was manned by the able-bodied amongst the third-class. The order came to haul in the slack, to which the moujiks responded with a will. As long as the rope was not taut it was an easy job, but as it took the strain the workers had naturally to climb over it and one of their number tripped. This put the next man behind out of stride and amidst much mirth he also tripped. The others immediately stopped work and the capstan took charge, leaving a pile of struggling forms on the deck as witness to the fact

that, at least, it had performed its duty efficiently. This was repeated twice or thrice, and then the tree-trunk jibbed and finally broke. The wealthy merchant now suggested pushing with poles and everybody, including even the first-class passengers, lent a hand, with the result that the boat was more firmly settled on the bank than before.

By this time an admiring crowd had arrived from Tcherdin, and they also shouted emphatic advice from the shore. Then the captain decided to lighten the ship and the first cargo to go overboard were the third-class passengers, much to their disgust. True, the water was shallow at this point, but shorewards it deepened, coming up well above the knee. The ladies who were included in the captain's ukase, that is to say, the ladies of the third-class, protested bitterly. The captain was adamantine and over they went.

Insult was then added to injury, for the "Skora Boudet" being still obstinately aground, it was decided to unload a number of bags of salt, and these the long-suffering passengers had to carry to land. At length these efforts had the desired effect, and gradually the boat was manœuvred until a spot was reached whence shore communication was possible by means of a plank. It was a very narrow plank, very wobbly, and at the end there was an elevation of at least six feet up which everyone scrambled as best they could with the aid of moujiks' strong arms. Thus we arrived at Tcherdin.

This is a most picturesque little town, or rather village, since it numbers only six thousand inhabitants. It is perched on the top of a hill intersected by a deep gully, and offers a wonderful view of the surrounding country. In winter it must be lonely and

RIVER KAMA. "FAST ON A SANDBANK."

A MOUJIK'S LUGGAGE.

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isolated since the nearest railway is distant about eighty miles. But as we saw it, it was charming. In the immediate foreground lay the river and a wide green plain with countless cattle and a shrine, emblem perhaps of the Russian belief that these dumb creatures are not forgotten by their Creator.

For of all Christian nations the Russians are alone in their conviction, or rather in the outward and visible sign of that conviction, that the Almighty cares, not only for men and women, but also for the birds and beasts of the field. In their Litany they evidence it. What could be more pathetic or show a deeper tenderness than the following words: "And for those, also, O Lord, the humble beasts who with us bear the burden and heat of the day and offer their guiltless lives for the well being of their country, we supplicate Thy great tenderness of heart, for Thou, Lord, shalt save both man and beast, and great is Thy loving-kindness, O Master, Saviour of the world." *

In the far background loomed a dark misty cloud, ominous as though of thunder—the Urals.

In a little community like this, it is rather surprising to find that among the inhabitants there are those sufficiently interested in archæology and ancient remains as to have formed a museum, and a capital one it is. The exhibits consist chiefly of relics which have been dug up in the neighbourhood, cups, coins and rude implements. This is to show that rural Russia is not quite so uncultured as people imagine. The Cathedral of the Resurrection seemed to us specially interesting. Besides a particularly fine ikonostase with the twelve apostles half life size and a well-painted Resurrection in

* Vide English translation of Russian Litany, issued by the O.A.B.G., Bristol.

the centre, there is a very remarkable ikon in an old carved wooden frame. It represents the life of Christ and is surrounded by a border illustrating all the known ikons of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

Outside the church are the barracks which house the small garrison of Tcherdin. Only about half a company or one hundred men are quartered here, but during our brief stay we came to know them quite well, especially their sergeant, Michail Loteink. I promised to send the good fellow a photograph which I took of his comrades singing but, alas, I fear that he has long since left Tcherdin and is fighting the enemies of his country. At 8.30 every evening the little troop was paraded, an order was given, off came their caps and, standing rigidly at attention, they sang their evening prayer, concluding always with the Russian hymn. It was inexpressibly touching, and, since the Russians instinctively sing well and with great expression, there was a certain pathos about the ceremony which served to make one understand better the Russian soldier. It would be very easy to write a volume on this subject alone.

Of all the troops in the world probably the Russian " Ivan " is the least complaining, the most patient and, above all, the most modest. Broadly speaking, no Russian wants to fight. It is against his general trend of character and also opposed to those religious doctrines which, to a far greater degree than the outside world imagines, govern his actions. But when the time arrives and the fiat goes forth that he must offer his life for his country, it is to him something of the call of the crusader of yore, something semi-sacred, something which God wills and the moujik must give. And it is that

TCHERDIN. SOLDIERS SINGING.
Taken 10 p.m.

TCHERDIN. CHURCH OF THE ASCENSION.

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thought and that belief which accompanies him in the trenches, in a charge or during a retreat, and which makes the Russian troops probably the most difficult in the world to rout. Annihilated they may be, forced to retreat they may be, decimated, shell-torn and harassed they may be, but they never lose their *morale*. So much do they owe to that grand old faith which inspires and supports them. And at the same time, be it said, there is an entire absence of that spirit of "Gott mit uns" which has made of the German army the most hypocritical bearers of the emblem Christ gave to the world—the Cross.

No doubt in the heat of action men do things which later they regret, but I shall be surprised if, after the present war is over and the books are balanced, it can be proved that Russian soldiery have been guilty of organised atrocity. They do not possess either the education or the so-called "kultur" of the German soldier, and as events have proved they can be legitimately proud that they are free from it. Rather is their attitude, both in their daily life and in their actions towards others, that of humility, forbearance and patience. As far as human nature and its weaknesses allow they try to copy the Nazarene, and succeed in a way which naturally would be misunderstood and unappreciated by those tinged with the gross Teuton materialism. And here incidentally I am striking the bed-rock of the Russian hate for Germany; the German in his inflated, inconsequent and insupportable way seems to regard the Almighty as a temporarily useful ally and as an equal. The Russian turns to Him as his Father and his Friend, be there famine, be there danger, be there battle,

and his faith—a living, lasting, humble faith—is his guerdon, come what may.

After their hymn these lads would always entertain us; out would come the balalaikas and the choir would be arranged, conductor and all, and whilst we sat on a hummock of grass they would sing us their Russian peasant songs. There was one which was tremendously popular and which apparently described the dealings of a peasant with a merchant having an office on the Pristan (wharf). The refrain which was sung with immense gusto was always the same, "Yei, Yei, blagodaru yei," which it is impossible to translate literally, since "Yei" is simply an exclamation but which may be taken to mean, "Not much, thanks."

The balalaika is a curious little instrument, a sort of triangular guitar, and it is peculiarly appropriate for catching these haunting Russian peasant melodies. Latterly, in England, the balalaika has become known through the visits of M. Andreeff with his orchestra which is under the Emperor's own patronage. As long ago as the days of Nicholas I (*circa* 1840) a commission was formed to rescue from oblivion just such peasant melodies as I have described, which were never written but were passed on from father to son by ear. I believe that commission has never been dissolved to the present time. Members have naturally died and have been replaced until it has become a standing dish.

But their labours have been as nothing to those of M. Andreeff. Working under every discouragement which could dishearten mortal man, without funds or particular position, he fought on bravely. He transcribed the melodies he heard chanted by

the Volga bargees and other peasants in remoter parts of Russia, just such places as Tcherdin, and with wonderful perseverance built up a national music of the people which he was able to offer to his country. As in most cases his reward came late; the Duma, which was asked to vote him some sort of annual subsidy, on two separate occasions refused, and then the Czar himself intervened with the result that to-day M. Andreeff receives the sum of 40,000 roubles (£4000) annually from the Imperial Treasury.

One of the most retiring of men and one of the most simple, M. Andreeff avoids the limelight of the popular entertainer, but he did a real service to his country when he made known to the world its peasant music. It was the thin end of the wedge which was to show to the British public that Russia was not quite the land of their imagination, and that it possessed well-defined expressions of art, literature, music and popular feeling which until that time had only been appreciated by a cultured few. It is long since I saw M. Andreeff, but as an old and sincere friend of his I would like to think that he might read these lines.

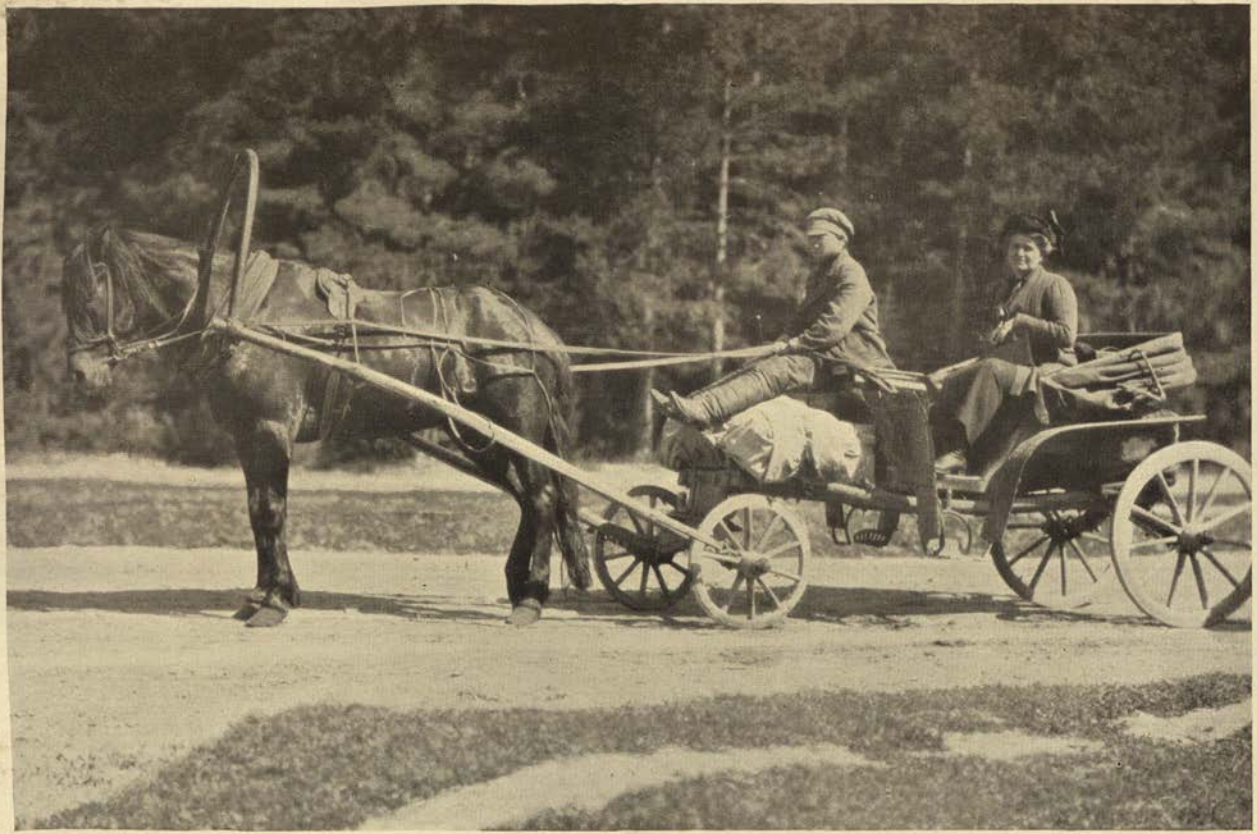
We enjoyed our stay at Tcherdin immensely. Not only were the inhabitants most friendly and hospitable, but the country around seemed to offer every possibility from a traveller's point of view. Its greatest fascination lay in its remoteness, its immensity and its intrinsic grandeur. It comes to one with a shock of surprise to learn that some twenty miles from a township may be found areas unmapped and to all intents and purposes unexplored. Nothing appeals with the insistence of the unknown: like children we all want to see

"beyond." And the "beyond" in Russia is infinity—it has no parallel elsewhere in the pulsing world. To find its similitude one must pass through the portals of death into eternity. And death as expressed by the analogy loses its sting and its terror.

We had it in mind to go back to Archangel via the upper reaches of the Kama and thence into the Petchora River. This is a perfectly feasible trip, but in order to carry it through speedily a motor-boat would be a necessity and one was not procurable. In addition, we had no tent and the country through which we should pass promised little chance of even a roof to cover our heads.

We then tried the post-road across the Urals to Verchoturie. But here again we were foiled. Post-horses were not available since, naturally, the river offers cheap and easy transport for mails, and the purchase of the necessary animals and a cart seemed an unsatisfactory investment. Hence we decided to go by boat to Beresniaki, the head of a local line chiefly used for mineral traffic which eventually, after crossing the Urals, connects with the main trans-Ural line at Tchuchova. River travel is delightful and, as at Veliki Ustjug, we found that the steamers provided an excellent substitute for a restaurant. So in common with everyone else in the place we also used them for that purpose.

In this connection I must narrate one incident which struck me as being very naïve. Four gentlemen came on board one evening to celebrate the birthday of one of the party. After they had had a bottle of beer each in the dining saloon, I saw a great deal of talking going on with the steward and



EN ROUTE. OUR POST-CART.

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found that a table was being prepared for them in one of the cabins. This struck me as peculiar, but it was not half so peculiar as the explanation given with the most unblushing frankness by the steward. "They are using the cabin, Barin, because you see it is an important party and they fear that they must get drunk."

There is only one drawback to this part of the country, the mosquitoes. To one's disordered imagination they seem about the size of partridges and to make a noise like a brass band. Their persistence is also remarkable. I have watched a battalion of them trying to pierce the thickness of a sleeping sack and when, in sheer self-defence, I have been compelled to envelop myself, head and all, in the bag, my wife has told me that she has seen them waiting patiently for me to make my reappearance. We tried every sort of method of stopping them and nothing seemed to do any good with the exception of burning Keating's powder. This certainly discouraged them but it also discouraged us, for so pungent were the fumes that they drove us out of the cabin.

On our journey to Beresniaki we caused considerable interest because, as we were assured again and again, no one ever travelled by that route. True it was not an encouraging outlook.

Beresniaki consists of a pontoon landing-stage, a scrub-covered sandbank, one large salt refinery and the railway station. We left the boat at three in the afternoon amidst a stream of good-natured chaff. One passenger assured us that there was no need for us to hurry as the next train was at 3.30 in the morning. I must admit that the prospect did not look very hopeful and as the steamer backed away

from the pier our hearts sank somewhat. Then we made a disquieting discovery—the station possessed no buffet. And foolishly we had neglected to replenish our provision-basket.

Already has been enumerated all that exists at Beresniaki, so it is needless to emphasise the fact that there was no conveyance of any kind to carry us the six versts to the next station, though even had there been it would have made no difference since there was no road thither. It is wearisome to continue a catalogue of things which did not exist, but the final spur which led us to action was the discovery that there was no waiting-room except the ticket hall, as usual crowded with moujiks sleeping and lying on the floor. Our arrival with our baggage aroused instant interest. I think we must have been the first foreigners who had ever been seen here. Everybody crowded around us and probably, had we been in better fettle, we should have been embarrassed. Our carte blanche saved the situation, since on showing it to the nachalnik (station-master) he proved most helpful, assuring us that he would register the heavy baggage and see it into the train. He, also, it was, who recommended us to walk along the railway line to the next station where we should find a buffet.

My interview took place behind closed doors and created, so I heard afterwards, tremendous excitement. Unfortunately for the audience the key-hole had been thoughtfully blocked with paper, but by dint of straining their ears against the door-panels it was possible to overhear portions of the conversation which were detailed by one of the throng to the others with great enthusiasm.

"Ah, he has a paper from the Minister.—He

says he has much luggage.—The nachalnik says there is a buffet at Ust Solskaia and tells him to walk.—He is now shaking hands with the Niemetz." (German.) All foreigners are classed under the one head of Niemetz in Russia, probably because there are so many more Germans than other nationalities. The term, of course, originates from the adjective "nieme," which means "dumb, one who cannot speak."

My reappearance accompanied by the nachalnik caused just as much pleasure as a circus in a country village. I happened to be wearing knickerbockers and evidently those garments struck everyone as being strange articles of raiment. Each man nudged his neighbour and stared long and earnestly at my legs; in fact, so long and so earnestly that I never again dared so to clothe myself during the entire trip. The weighing of the luggage was an operation in which all took part. Everybody hazarded suggestions as to the weight and the sum we should have to pay, their remarks being of a distinctly pessimistic nature, suggesting that we probably had not got enough money or that we should certainly have to see it placed on the train ourselves. However, we were spared that fate.

We called for volunteers to carry our hand baggage, and amongst those who came forward was one unfortunate deaf and dumb man who very nearly multiplied our registration fee many times by moving the indicator on the scale. It was evident that he was terribly poor, though I expect that he did not fare so badly since, in Russia more than in any other country, an unfortunate of this character receives sympathy and material assistance even from those who are scarcely better off

than himself. We regretfully refused his services but I have never seen gratitude depicted so strongly, I might say so beautifully, upon any face as upon his when we gave him a small "nachai" (tip).

Then we started off along the railway, a curious procession, and I noticed that the men all chose to carry the baggage upon their heads—native fashion. It was a weird proceeding. Darkness had come on and the woods had suddenly closed in upon us. Silently we tramped along, the yellow streak of the railway acting as our guide. It was one of the most monotonous walks I have ever made. Tired, hungry and thirsty, at length the welcome lights of Ust Solskaia hove in sight. There was one forlorn-looking engine standing cold and motionless in a siding, there were some equally forlorn-looking trucks on another siding and the station was in darkness. To add to that the buffet was closed and our spirits sank to zero. Out came the carte blanche, however, followed by a visit to the station-master. From somewhere a woman turned up who proved to be the manageress of the buffet. Never has cold veal tasted so good, never has a bottle of Crimean wine been drunk with greater gusto and never has the prospect of any sort of bed seemed so alluring.

We were to have one more shock that night when the station-master suggested that it was just possible that there might be no passenger-carriages on the train, but happily that turned out not to be the case, and at three in the morning two very tired individuals scrambled into a distinctly not over-clean second-class carriage. We were glad to reach even so unattractive a haven : Fortune might have favoured us with something much worse.

CHAPTER IX

VERCHOTURIE AND THE URALS

ON several previous occasions it has been my lot to cross the Urals, but never by this particular route, which at present, is the most northerly railway line connecting Europe and Asia. Any slight inconveniences encountered were more than repaid by the exquisite charm of its scenery. In the previous chapter I recounted our start from Ust Solskaia; rarely had we been so tired and, although on the following day we discovered amongst the Keating's many corpses, we were much too grateful for our rest to cavil at such a trifle.

The night had been cool and refreshing after the heat of the day, for which reason we lowered the carriage window, much to the irritation of an old dame in the next section. At first she complained bitterly and, as we took no heed, must afterwards have crept in without awakening us and closed it, since we found it in that condition in the morning. Naturally we lowered it again, and until noon, when we arrived at Tchuchova, the old woman addressed meetings at every railway station anent our conduct, how we had imperilled her life, how she was certain to have rheumatism, and what strange people we must be to like the cold. In point of fact it was not cold, but the average Russian is something of a salamander. On a hot summer's day when literally

the perspiration has been streaming off one, the opening of a window in a steamboat has met with a friendly protest. For those habitually exposed to the extremes of a severe "continental climate" it is a truly remarkable thing that a draught should be to them such a bogey. At big hotels, even in the principal towns, one often encounters windows which will not open and rooms which can only be aired by means of an electric fan.

At Tchuchova this line joins the Perm-Ekaterinburg railway, and since there was a delay of about an hour we took the opportunity of having lunch. And then, for the first time, we noticed a distinct change in the demeanour of the people. There was a something, a soupçon of independence which, without being blatantly pronounced, was sufficient to arrest the attention of the observant. It was the preliminary of that difference in temperament which is so marked between the peasant of the new world, Siberia, and his fellow-countryman in European Russia. As we sat in the buffet eating our leisurely meal we could watch them; great, big-boned men in the roughest of clothes. By their manner it was easy to see that these were no ordinary moujiks, but men of means. One who sat near us casually handed the waiter a hundred-rouble note in payment of what he had had and as casually received back the change, not even troubling to count it. The fact of it is that, in this Ural region as well as in Siberia, there are numbers of such men who may not inaptly be compared with well-to-do settlers in Canada. Their environment has not been greatly dissimilar, they have been obliged in no small degree to be dependent upon their own exertions which breeds enterprise, and thus

they have attained that spirit of rather aggressive equality which is liable to be slightly irritating. Book-learning forms a minor part of their equipment, but they make up for any defects in that direction by considerable shrewdness and a certain hard-headed tenacity in business contests.

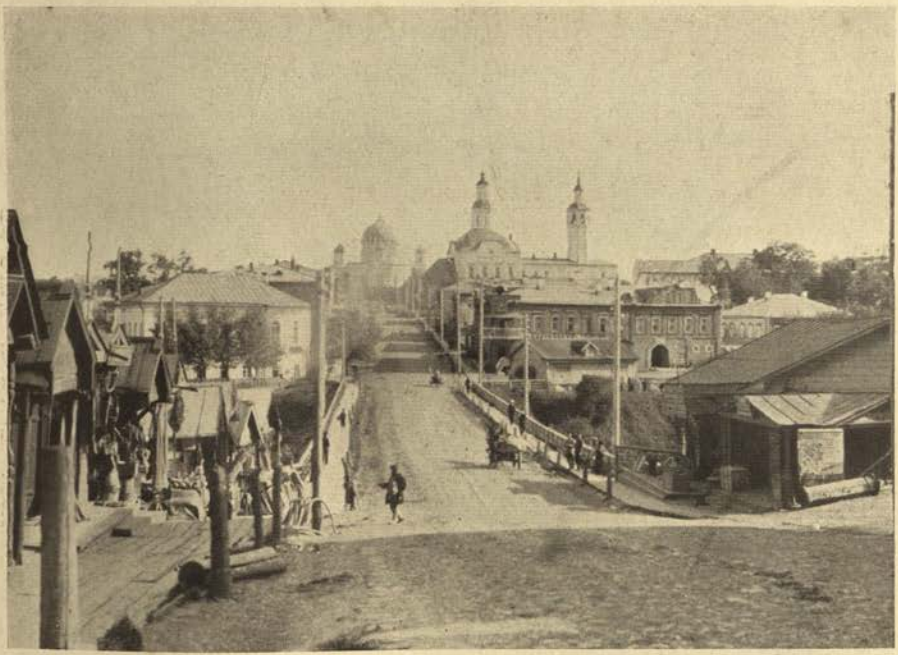
After Tchuchova the Urals are seen at their best. The train slowly rumbles along on an ever-rising gradient, and one has glimpses of huge wooded gorges and miles of uninterrupted forest-clad mountains. Every now and again, with a shriek from the engine, we carefully wend our way over spider-like bridges, and far below can be seen those mountain torrents which I have been told offer excellent fishing. As the summit of the range is neared the names of the stations themselves give warning. We pass "Europe." The engine pants increasingly and the gradient becomes more severe. Then slowly we pull into another station, "Ural Summit." Thereafter the gradient becomes downward and the next station is called "Asia." To be precise, its name is a misnomer since Perm Government extends as far as Ekaterinburg, some hundreds of versts distant, and belongs from an administrative point of view to European Russia. Generally speaking, however, Siberia is popularly regarded as all that land lying east of the Urals.

Our conductor on this train was a remarkable character and at first attracted our attention by speaking to us in excellent French. He recounted how he had been a waiter in Paris, a commercial traveller in Germany for a firm of perfume manufacturers, as well as having put in several months in London as a printer. To add to his cosmopolitanism he was married to a German who lived at Mentone and

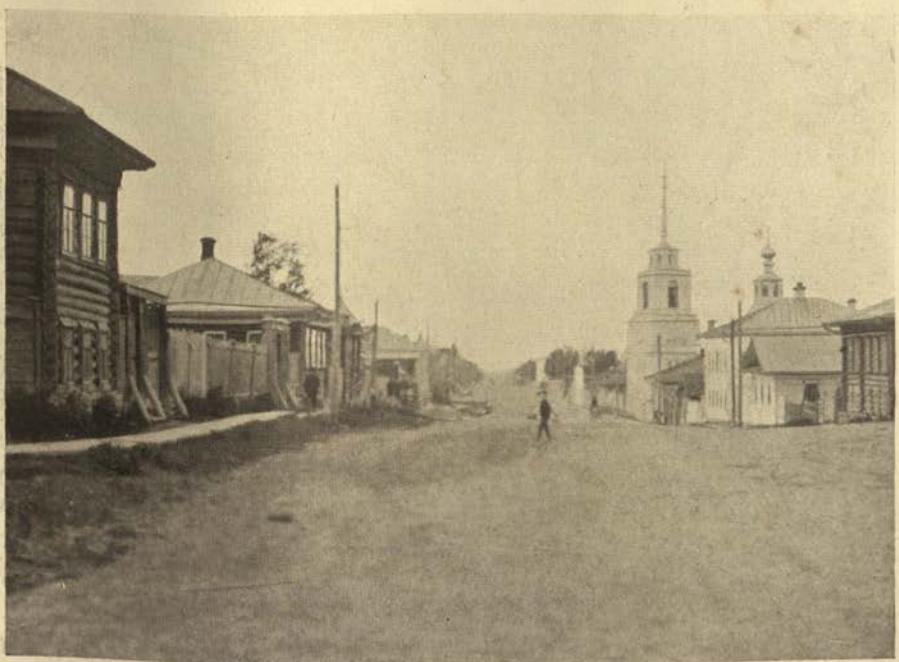
taught music. On finding that we were English he manifested an enormous interest in us and gave us not a few hints about Ekaterinburg. More, he gave us his address in that city, volunteered to act as our guide in his spare time, and finished up by asking us to drink tea with him in the most perfectly natural and unsophisticated manner. As I have before remarked, I believe Russia to be the only country in the world where such delightful simplicity can never be mistaken for impertinence, and where class differences, although apparently forming a great gulf between the various strata of society, are actually so easily bridged. The genus "snob," as understood in England, has no counterpart in Russia, that is to say amongst the Russians uncontaminated by many years' residence abroad.

It was fatigue which decided us to stop at Goroblagodatska. Our friend the conductor was emphatic. "But it is an awful place, Monsieur! There is nothing there! It is a village with ironworks, but there is no hotel and no accommodation, I am certain, for Madame." However, as events proved there was no possible alternative, since the train reached Goroblagodatska at nine at night and the connection for Verchoturie did not leave until twelve the next day. Moreover, we wanted to see what one of these trans-Ural factory villages was like. Upon our arrival, as always, the first thing we did was to patronise the station buffet, since experience had taught us that hunger was a bad assistant with which to work.

From this point to Ekaterinburg we had decided to travel light, and so, for the time being, our heavy baggage was left in charge of one of the local porters. And in this connection the following is of undoubted



VIATKA. A TYPICAL STREET.



TIUMEN. A TYPICAL SIBERIAN STREET.

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interest. Upon all Russian railways the station porters are banded together into an artel or association, all tips being pooled and the artel making itself jointly and severally responsible for the mistakes or even defalcations of its members. Thus a passenger may, with the utmost confidence, give a porter a five hundred rouble bill, tell him to secure a ticket to Vladivostock and to register his heavy baggage. Meanwhile the traveller can amuse himself where and how he wishes with the full knowledge that he will receive in ample time before the departure of the train his change, his ticket and his "gepäckschein." He will find his small bags neatly and carefully stowed away in the compartment named upon his "platzkarte," and he will have been saved all that unnecessary anxiety and bother which is the concomitant of everyday travel in England. Of all institutions in Russia this system seems to me one of the most practical, and certainly it is worthy of imitation elsewhere.

Next upon the programme was the search for our night's lodging. I had heard of a "nomera" (furnished room) near the station, and this I went to inspect. There was no staircase, but a sort of wooden ladder which led to the upper floor where were situated what were supposed to be the bedrooms. I imagine that at no very distant date the place had been a warehouse of sorts, which someone endowed with enterprise and with the aid of a few strips of lath had transformed into an apology for a night refuge. The rooms were very small, very dirty, and the walls in no case reached to the ceiling. The atmosphere was indescribable; there were no washing appliances or conveniences of any kind, and a fourpenny doss-house which I once visited in

Liverpool seemed luxury in comparison. For this accommodation I was gravely asked two roubles and a half a night, exclusive, of course, of light and linen. Back I went to the station, and this time interviewed the "nachalnik." He was courtesy personified, offered us the use of the waiting-rooms, such as they were, for the period of our stay, and in the meantime sent for a young student whom he thought likely to know of something more promising in the village itself, a distance of four versts. This proved more successful. There was a widow woman, we were told, who had rooms both clean and respectable and we should be wise to go thither.

This lodging, though distinctly primitive, we were, it appears, lucky to find. Our room contained one small bed and a couch, a table and two chairs. Outside in the passage was a sink and a bucket of water, which we were expected to share with the other guests. In this respect the Russians are very peculiar. Presumably these extremely simple and rather embarrassing toilet arrangements are planned on the supposition that at a place like Goroblagodatska the female element would usually be entirely unrepresented. But in addition, certainly amongst the peasantry, their absolute lack of self-consciousness permits of situations which we should regard as highly indecent. Thus, in the summer it is quite common in country districts for the young men and maidens to bathe together in a state of nature. There are those who see in these conditions the highest form of morality, since that which becomes a matter of course rarely carries with it that spirit of false modesty which is the greatest enemy of morality. But, be that as it may, the washing problem in rural Russia is a thorny one for travellers

GOROBLAGODATSKA. "A STREET OF THE FUTURE."
It commences nowhere and ends in infinity.

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of the gentler sex, and the portable washhand-stand becomes practically a necessity.

In addition, the door of our bedroom was innocent of either latch, bolt or lock, but there were two rings through which we passed a bit of cord and which in some slight degree ensured our privacy. This proved to be, incidentally, the sole occasion on which, in spite of an extravagant use of Keating's, we were seriously troubled with vermin. They literally swarmed and, defying every precaution, succeeded in finding undefended points for attack. They might almost have had mathematical training, since they dropped from the ceiling with the greatest precision on to our couches.

As usual we made our chief meal at the railway buffet, and for the rest catered and cooked for ourselves. Goroblagodatska is a pretty little place, spoilt by ugly excrescences in the shape of ironworks. It spreads itself along the western end of a lake of considerable size. But, as I suppose is common with most towns of this nature, there was a certain air of squalor which was depressing. It is a curious fact that this particular squalor is never nonplussed even by prosperity. In England, Walsall, Burslem and Sheffield are thriving commercial centres, but the prosperous circumstances of their inhabitants cannot do away with the drab outlook of endless streets with two-storied houses, all fashioned apparently from exactly the same model. True, Goroblagodatska cannot boast of this monotony of architecture, but its streets straggle, are knee-deep in mud or alternatively in dust, and its atmosphere is brutal. But that, incidentally, one finds in all industrial communities. It does not mean that the inhabitants take their tone from their

surroundings, but merely that such surroundings may legitimately be expected to leave their mark upon the inhabitants.

The moujik of the land, to whom we had grown accustomed and who had endeared himself to us, was conspicuous by his absence. These folk were uncouth, suspicious and altogether foreign to our preconceived ideas of the Russian peasant. But then they were not peasants in the proper acceptance of the term, and it cannot be denied that the translation of the moujik into the factory hand is attended by a far greater change of tone and character than the same transition in England. Hitherto it has been a transition practically unaccompanied by the refining influence of education, and, bereft of that stay, in any country the transference of agricultural to mechanical labour has always a tendency to brutalise. The agriculturist, the shepherd, the farmer, whatever he may be, has to deal with the forces of nature. He possesses a spirit of healthy antagonism to those particular climatic effects which may tend to render nugatory his efforts. It is a combat of man against nature, and, as I have shown previously, assists to develop character, quite irrespective of the board school, along normal and healthy lines. It instils into the unit a certain fearless defiance of Nature's moods which, in course of time, renders a man reliant and independent and which, by a gradual process of evolution, makes of him one who may not inaptly be described as the salt of the earth. This constant combat, even to the untutored mind, has a refining and elevating influence.

Far different, however, is it if the same character be cast into the melting-pot of factory life. Here

GOROBLAGODATSKA. THE FIRE-BELL.

RIVER KAMA. THE VILLAGE OF GUBKAR.

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there is no struggle against nature ; there is merely a stern drudgery of a purely mechanical sort, of unrelieved monotony at one special task, which, if unaccompanied by the alleviation of primal education, can only tend to degrade. As an example. Who would compare the illiterate shepherd, whose eternal task it is to watch over flocks upon the hill-side, and who is wholly unable either to write his name or to give any coherent opinion upon those questions which habitually stir the heart of a country such as the betterment of labour conditions, the housing of the poor, wages and old age pensions, with the man who, with the same education or rather lack of education, chooses day after day to stand by a machine making rivets ?

That seems to me one of the keynotes of the constant unquiet in Russian industrialism. On the one hand, there is the individual in close communion with nature, and nowhere is there a better teacher than the latter or a pupil with a keener perception of its message than the moujik. It humanises him, and he learns lessons from an unwritten book of far greater value than those which his more highly skilled brother is supposed to imbibe from the written script in the workshop. In other words, the Russian is an agriculturist born. Place him in a factory, and his receptive brain will acquire impressions, which from the mere exuberance of its receptivity will be multiplied and exaggerated until they transcend the laws of common-sense, and will lead him to commit precisely those errors which, in the past, have rendered him a poor working machine. And it is this characteristic which has caused the administration endless worry to the extent of the suggestion being seriously considered that in

Siberia alien labour might prove, in some cases, not only acceptable but preferable. That this measure will ever be adopted I doubt. There is such an overwhelming body of native-born labour for whom employment must be found, that it is highly improbable such a solution would be practicable. But, as I show at some length towards the end of this chapter, the Boguslavsky Company have offered a difficult problem over their labour question, and it seems impossible that a return to the bad old conditions, which formerly existed there, will ever be tolerated. On the other hand, however, it must be remembered that the abolishment of the vodka monopoly, due to the present war, has been tantamount to the removal of a deadly cancer in the body of the Russian people. Never did surgeon so cleanly and easily cleanse a human body of its dangerous impurities as the Emperor did with one stroke of his pen, when he removed from the body politic the terrible scourge of vodka. But my point is, that when British capitalists, business men and others discuss Russian industrialism they should remember that the Slav navvy is on a totally different plane from that of his British colleague, and that what is applicable and even beneficial to the one may only act as an irritant and even as a poison to the other, so different is their environment.

Sunday at Goroblagodatska has its own peculiar celebration. There is nothing religious about it. It consists of the youths of the town, mounted on shaggy little ponies, galloping wildly up and down the main street uttering tremendous war-whoops. The mere pedestrian is a nuisance, and has a poor chance of consideration. These ponies nominally belong to the ironworks, and are used for hauling

A WAYSIDE SHRINE.

These are as common in North Russia as roadside crucifixes in France and Italy.

VERCHOTURIE. THE FORMER "CURSE" OF RUSSIA—THE VODKA FACTORY.

N.B.—Verchoturie has, perhaps, 5,000 inhabitants.

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slag along the trolley lines to the dump during the week. But on the Sunday, they probably enjoy their mad career round the town as much as those who look after them. Towards evening, in a lather of perspiration, they will be led down to the lake where they go for a swim with the utmost enjoyment, the majority of the population having meantime assembled to see the fun. They are wild little devils, these ponies. They kick, they plunge, they bite. I saw one turn on his tormentor, as he deemed him to be, chase him up the street, catch him in the neighbourhood of our "nomera" and seize him by the seat of his trousers, much to the delight of the bystanders, who enthusiastically cheered the pony.

And it was at Goroblagodatska that we first made the acquaintance of the iron cane painted to resemble wood, seldom or never seen in European Russia, and which in the hands of a young hooligan is a dangerous weapon. Probably most of those who read this book will be cognisant of the manner of death meted out to Ivan the Terrible's eldest son. Ivan, with the perverse humour characteristic of him, is reported to have had made an enormous malacca staff surmounted by a gold cap, but the malacca was, in fact, cast iron. When irritated he would hastily tap his victim upon the head or shoulder, usually leaving a painful reminiscence. I do not propose to make a long historical digression, but finally, angry with his own first-born, he struck him on the head with this redoubtable cane and killed him. The subject has been dramatically pictured by the Russian artist, Repine, whose delineation of the episode is to be found at present in the Tret[illegible]llery at Moscow, shrouded in

curtains only lifted occasionally for the benefit of a visitor, so horrible is it in its morbid portrayal.

Well, for what reason these Siberian youths arm themselves with the counterparts of Ivan's historic stick, I know not. But I do know that they gave one a bad impression of young Russia in these parts. They were rude, over-curious, blustering and insolent, though in that respect probably they were not far different from the pit-boys one might meet in Northumbrian coal-fields. And I make mention of it only because the comparison between industrial and agricultural Russia seems so striking; whether it be the agriculturalism of the far-away Baraba steppe in Siberia or the primitive farming of my friends in Archangel Province compared with the undertone of savagery one could detect at a little place like Goroblagodatska or the active menaces of great factory communities such as Moscow and Petrograd.

Again I believe that the war will have acted as a purge, a purge which will serve to eradicate the irresponsible agitator, who in the large centres was previously able to work upon minds of extraordinary pliability. One has but to recall the strikes in Petrograd during July, 1914, and the terrible possibilities connected therewith, which in one moment were solved by the magic word "war." Instanter, personal or fancied grievances were obliterated in a great wave of enthusiasm for the public weal, and therein lies a great meed of hope for the new Russia. What other country in the world would have accepted with such equanimity the imposition of the prohibition of vodka, what other country in the world would have shown a patriotism strong enough to sink such

deeply founded antipathies as those represented by capitalism and labour, orthodoxy and atheism, radicalism and bureaucracy, for the sake of the New Russia ?

Verchoturie lies north-west of Goroblagodatska some ninety-eight versts (sixty-five miles), and is connected with it by a railway which belongs to the Boguslavsky works, the termination of the line being at Nadejdinsky. And it is this line which, it is hoped, will one day be extended over the Urals to Archangel. The existing railway is of the regular Russian standard gauge and, if such a thing can be imagined, is operated in an even more leisurely manner than those under Government administration. The departure of the train—there is only one daily—appears to be a matter of chance, and when once a start is made its progress may be gauged by the fact that Verchoturie is reached between seven and eight hours later. Its average speed, therefore, works out at about eight miles an hour and this through practically level country.

The town of Verchoturie lies some seven versts from the railway station and is approached by quite the best road we had ever seen in Russia. On enquiry we discovered that, like most things in this district, it had been made and was owned by the Boguslavsky company. Verchoturie itself is of ancient foundation, having been built in 1598, prior to which time there appears to have been a thriving settlement of Zirians. The *raison d'être* of its genesis apparently was the fact that it lay on the high road across the Urals from Solikamsk and European Russia to Tobolsk, which, even at that date, was in use as a place of exile for political offenders. In 1604 the great monastery of St.

Nicholas was founded, with which is bound up the history of the holy St. Simeon, who attained great sanctity, and has become much venerated throughout the whole of Russia. In commemoration of its foundation an enormous church has recently been built within the monastery walls, to which it was expected the Czar would make a pilgrimage, and for which purpose a little bijou palace was erected, of which more anon. But, needless to say, now that the war is claiming the attention of all Russia, the pilgrimage has been indefinitely postponed.

When we announced our intention of visiting this interesting little place, it is really only a large village, everyone agreed that we must stay at the Female Monastery, and this we decided to do. In the first place it would be something of an experience for us, and in the second we were heartily sick of the provincial "nomera." But our driver from the station had other views. Almost before we had established ourselves in his cart he was imploring us not to go to the nuns, since he knew of a much better place. We were firm, however, and eventually we arrived at the Monastery of the Intercession of the Virgin. The monastery proper stands on the left bank of a deep gully, whilst the rest-house, approached by a bridge, is on the opposite bank. Behind the monastery lies the little town, and facing it is a great sweep of farm-land backed by rolling forest. In the foreground there meanders along a little river.

It so happened that the time of our arrival was sunset. From afar came the sound of singing, and there below us we could see some hundred nuns walking slowly back from their day's farm work. They had been mowing, carried scythes over their

VERCHOTURIE. DISTANT VIEW OF GREAT MONASTERY OF ST. NICHOLAS.

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shoulders and seemed to be singing from very joyfulness of heart. They wore enormous white sun-bonnets, white kerchiefs across their shoulders, blue print dresses with short skirts half-way up to the knee and a sort of Hessian boot. They looked immensely picturesque and blended naturally with their surroundings, making an excellent subject for the brush of an artist.

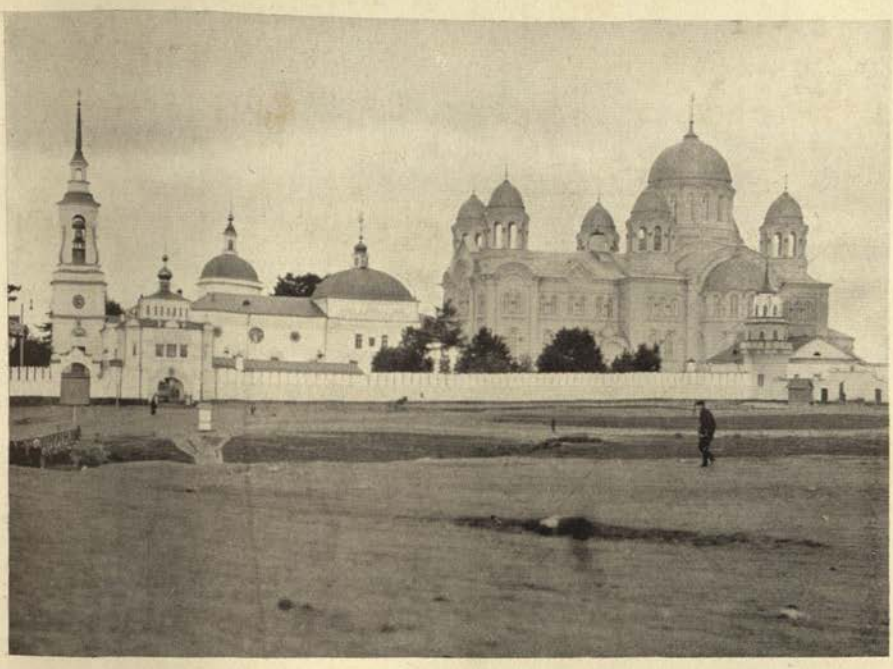
Our reception was rather a suspicious one. The nun in charge of the rest-house at once asked us for our passports, which we handed over with readiness, though we suspected strongly, what turned out to be the case, that they could not be read. We were then shown our room, which rather reminded us of a prison cell. There was one window which actually did open and which we found most useful for the disposal of rubbish, since it looked out on a piece of neglected garden, which other visitors had also thought of using as a rubbish heap. There were two narrow board couches, four small round stools and a table. The walls were calcimined, there was happily no carpet (in an institution of this nature a carpet would become a perfect nest for insects) and, as usual, the partitioning walls did not reach the ceiling. Also, as usual, the washing arrangements were in the public passage and no attention had been paid to that privacy which western standards demand. But on the other hand, it must be remembered that any stranger or traveller, be he noble or moujik, has an equal right to this accommodation, so long as there is space, and that no charge of any kind is made. Here we noticed that samovars were provided free, gratis and for nothing, a concession which is not made at Solovetz, where there is a standard tariff for such conveniences. Naturally, when leaving,

some small pourboire is expected, which, from its being left to the generosity of the donor, is usually considerably more than could otherwise be legitimately charged. I might here mention that there are no public rooms, as understood in England, and that during one's stay one's cell acts as dining-room and everything else combined.

The sisters in charge of the rest-house are those who are not physically fit for the farm work and show no special aptitude for the embroidery, ikon painting and other crafts practised by the community. Hence it happened that our two sisters had each lost an eye, one the right and the other the left, and since they greatly resembled each other the result was curious. At first these nuns were a trifle cold in their manner, but gradually they thawed and became our very good friends.

The first evening we had a patchwork meal in our cell, but next day and thereafter we found a tiny restaurant which saved us trouble, and where we got excellent simple food at a ridiculously moderate price. The proprietor was deeply flattered by our patronage, and whenever he saw us coming would hastily produce his whole stock of illustrated papers, dating back eight or ten years some of them, in the hope that we might find something to our taste.

The Nicolaievesky monastery is rather disappointing from the inside. The new church is a splendid building, serves as a landmark for miles, and would not disgrace any great city. It is also not so florid without or so gaudy within as the majority of Russian churches. It contains the tomb of St. Simeon, and beyond that calls for no particular remark. Certainly the most picturesque portions of the old monastery are the outside walls, which are



VERCHOTURIE. THE GREAT MONASTIC CHURCH OF ST. NICHOLAS.
A Russian paradox—this huge modern edifice in a village.

VERCHOTURIE. ENTRANCE TO MONASTERY OF ST. NICHOLAS.

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crenellated, loopholed and evidently built to resist armed attack. When it was announced that the Emperor might make a pilgrimage hither, the monks set to work and with their own hands built a datcha (a wooden bungalow) in honour of their imperial guest. It stands in the midst of a garden surrounded by pine trees, except on the valley side, where there is an uninterrupted view of the fields and forest. Through the kindness of the Archimandrite we were allowed to visit it, and it afforded a curious insight into the monkish idea of what comfort their ruler ought to enjoy.

And, incidentally, uncommonly good judges they were. I asked our guide whether any of the furniture had come from England, to which he replied, "Well, not actually furniture, but we know the English excel in this sort of thing," and he showed us a most delightful white-tiled bath-room with hot and cold water and the latest appliances in the way of showers and sprays, all of which were English made. The rooms were certainly small, but furnished with excellent taste, and when one considers that the use to which this datcha would be put would probably not exceed a week for the next ten years, one cannot help marvelling at this very material display of devotion. No doubt the foundation is a rich one, but even so there was a something not a little touching in the obvious pride the monks took in their handiwork, a present to their beloved Emperor.

At our own monastery we thoroughly enjoyed watching the various work which was being carried on. As at Ustjug, as far as the embroidery was concerned, they had orders in hand for the next two or three years. They make a speciality, however, of

a species of coarse filet work, work which we never saw elsewhere, and which was extremely effective. The ikon painting offered room for no particular comment, but in this connection we were fortunate in becoming possessed of a very valuable old specimen. Being used as a copy there was an ikon of the Crucifixion in a state of fair preservation. It was surrounded by a metal border which might have been made of anything. We asked the sister in charge whether she would care to sell it. She misunderstood our request, however, and said they could easily paint a copy for us at the price of five roubles. We explained that that was not what we wanted, we were anxious to have only the original! "That old thing!" she said, contemptuously. "We've never sold anything like that before, and we have never been asked for it, but I will enquire of my Superior." With that she left the room, and came back a minute or two later, saying, "Oh, yes, you can have it if you want it. Is one rouble too much for you, do you think?" The rouble speedily changed hands, and later we showed the ikon to an antique dealer in Petrograd. He pointed out to us the Government stamp on the metal framing, which turned out to be repoussé silver work of date 1735, while the picture itself was probably a century older.

In this connection he informed us that ikons showing the sun and moon on either side of the central figure may be taken roughly as dating from the sixteenth century. Also the small head which appears at the top of all old Russian crucifixes is representative of God the Father. For the moujik was not supposed to be able to understand what he could not see, and hence the necessity of materially visualising the Head of the Trinity. It is only

VERCHOTURIE. NUNNERY OF INTERCESSION OF BLESSED VIRGIN (*vide* Text).

VERCHOTURIE. GUEST-HOUSE OF NUNNERY OF INTERCESSION OF BLESSED VIRGIN, WHERE WE STAYED.

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latterly that the subject of ikons has been deemed worthy of research in Russia; but in a short time an amazing amount of work has been accomplished, and those who would care to delve deeper into the study have already some excellent authorities at their disposal.

By the time that we had to leave Verchoturie we felt quite at home in the monastery. Our stylographic pens were to the nuns a source of never-ending mystery, since none of them could read or write, that is to say, of those with whom we were brought into contact. Our books also filled them with interest, and on the eve of our departure they were immensely delighted by the gift of two books for the possession of which they had broadly hinted. True, one was illustrated, a French book of somewhat doubtful merit called *L'Envers d'une Courtisane*, whilst the other was *The Paladin* by Horace Annesley Vachell. They handled these volumes with all the respect that a bibliophile would pay to a first edition, and informed us with enthusiasm that they would find a lasting place in the convent library. Queer companions, the lives of St. Cyril, St. Olga and St. Barbara, *L'Envers d'une Courtisane* and *The Paladin!*

The Verchoturie of to-day practically exists upon its monastic foundations which tends to make it restful; were it more accessible there would be many worse places to put in a holiday. Everybody seemed friendly, there appeared to be no poor, and although there was no luxury the atmosphere spoke of solid comfort. Moreover the country around is undeniably beautiful. Those who know Branksome and the outskirts of Bournemouth generally can gain some sort of idea of its characteristics.

Some fifty miles north of this little sequestered corner lie the immense undertakings of the Boguslavsky works. This forms one of the most important enterprises in the whole of the Russian Empire, and deserves more than passing mention. The number of men employed in the various branches varies in estimate, but I was told that *in toto* they amounted to some tens of thousands. To take one branch alone—timber, the company possesses and works five hundred thousand dessiatines (one million five hundred acres) of timber-land of its own, and leases a similar amount from the Crown. When it is realised that the major portion of the material is shipped overseas, and that its nearest port of shipment is Archangel, which can only be reached after an extremely roundabout journey of some thousands of miles, and then taking into consideration the tremendous expenses of haulage, some idea of the value of this asset alone can be gained. It is the homely example which is generally the most effective. The company has a contract with Colman Bros. of mustard fame, and the neat white deal box commonly seen in the grocer's shop had its origin at Boguslavsky. Again, the annual output of timber from these works to so remote a centre as Bokhara amounts to twelve hundred truck-loads, whilst in 1914 a seven thousand ton steamer laden with nothing but Boguslavsky timber cleared from Archangel for Delagoa Bay.

As mentioned elsewhere the company possesses copper mines, coal mines, blast furnaces, rolling mills for rails, gold in payable quantities, some platinum, in fact almost every branch of industry is represented. And, as might be expected, the labour question has always been more difficult than

VERCHOTURIE. CATHEDRAL OF THE TRINITY.

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any other of solution. The district is far removed from the great centres of population and, in addition, does not offer much scope for agriculture. Hence supplies are obliged to come from afar, and especially during the winter months take a considerable time in arriving. Actual inhabitants of the region are few and far between, and there are great areas which have never been opened up and still remain practically unexplored and unexploited. Now this labour problem is precisely the same as that met with in Eastern Siberia on the Amur River and other even more isolated, though possibly richer, portions of that country. Rightly or wrongly, the proposal of the importation of Chinese labour has been rigidly barred by the Government, though the wisdom of that particular policy is undoubtedly open to question.

However, as far as Boguslavsky is concerned, an alternative idea has been suggested, and it remains to be seen how it will work. Briefly, for every family possessing at least two adult males, the company provides twelve and a half dessiatines of land (thirty acres), together with a grant of three hundred and fifty roubles paid upon their taking up possession. At the expiration of five years the hard cash must be repaid, but the land belongs to the immigrants in perpetuity. One would think that such a liberal provision would attract a great number of eager colonists from south-eastern Russia, but at present it is too soon to hazard whether or no the scheme will prove a success. Hitherto the imported labour has been responsible for great trouble. Some years ago the vodka shops at the mines were closed by administrative order, but the result was very discouraging. So

surely as water finds its own level will the Russian miner find vodka. I was told that it was common for a miner to trudge twelve miles one way and twelve miles back upon order that he might spend a portion of his pay in his favourite poison. But, unfortunately, there are plenty of middle-men and retailers who realise that a good thing can be made out of this weakness, and who accordingly have hitherto bought the vodka at forty kopecks the half-gallon and have retailed it at R.1.50.

This in itself forms one of the most troublesome questions facing the directors of the company, though it would appear that once and for all, the war, with its abolition of the vodka monopoly, will have solved the problem. At the beginning of 1914 the lawlessness in the whole region had assumed terrible proportions. In Russia there is no death sentence for civil crimes as opposed to political offences. Moreover, it would seem to be the fact that the judges, or legal officers in the district, were themselves terrorised and passed totally inadequate sentences for the most brutal of murders, needless to say much to the irritation of the civilians concerned.

During Easter week, 1914, there were twenty-four murders, not all of them, be it said, due to alcoholism, but the result of a curious wave of brutality which appears sporadically to sweep over the industrial workers in the remoter parts of Russia. For instance, one youth of eighteen murdered an old man for a pair of much-worn boots, and when challenged in court admitted with bravado that this was his third murder! He was sentenced to two years' imprisonment! Anent this particular case, an official of the company told me that had a

more severe sentence been passed there would have been a danger of a general strike and not improbably of riots. Incidentally, that same youth will return to Boguslavsky as soon as his sentence is completed, and will expect again to be taken into employment. If this proves not to be the case, again there will be the danger of a strike, and so it goes on. The reason of this unsatisfactory state of affairs would appear to lie in the fact that these workers have no stake in the welfare of the community beyond drawing their weekly wage. They all come from afar, and as soon as they have got enough money they leave at once for their homes. Hence the proposition that families intending to reside permanently should receive sufficient land to make the offer enticing to them.

One point may be emphasised perhaps, namely, that there is no question of wages to account for this unrest. The Russian industrialist as opposed to the agriculturist and the moujik, in one respect, resembles an automatic machine. The more money he is paid the correspondingly less work he accomplishes. This feature in a certain type of working man is, I understand, not uncommon. I believe that something very similar has been observed in Great Britain regarding miners and their wages. The *raison d'être* of this state of things is not far to seek. It is the work of the agitators, those mischievous irritants of the body politic; they find amongst these men, who are separated for the time being from the humanising influences of their families and their customary surroundings, a fruitful soil for the exploitation of their own vicious schemes. Sincerity perhaps they possess, but to a man they are theoreticians, and think that by their puny

efforts they may be able to ante-date the millennium. As a matter of fact, this love of theory is common in the Russian character. I was talking with an English engineer, one who had been working at Boguslavsky, and he gave it as his opinion that the only thing wrong with the training of the skilled Russian engineer was his lack of practical experience. Theory he learnt in volumes, and, provided by nature with exceptional capabilities, he could invent and devise where the more prosaic would absolutely fail for want of idea. But let one of the cogs in the machine jam, let a bolt loosen and cause a temporary disarrangement of the gearing, and he was immediately at a loss. But once again the great upheaval of war will undoubtedly leave its mark; if it solidified the loyalty of the strikers in Petrograd, it may be trusted to do the same at Boguslavsky, in which case the dawn of to-morrow should spell the dawn of prosperity for the whole of this region of the northern Urals.

Leaving Verchoturie was a haphazard proceeding. No one knew when we could depart, so having dumped our belongings at the little station we wandered through woods carpeted with wild strawberries, fragrant with the smell of the pine, awaiting a train which eventually steamed in only four hours behind its stated time.

CHAPTER X

THE FUTURE OF THE RUSSIAN NORTH

HITHERTO I have refrained from tedious examinations of the commercial prospects in this great unexploited Russian North. Of Siberia I speak later and, hence, in order that the reader may not be confused, I prefer here to dwell upon the limitless possibilities of the former vast, practically untouched area. Just as in England the word Siberia has for long been incorrectly synonymous with the rigours of a never-ending winter, with convicts and with horrors, so has that huge, forest-clad plain to the north of the 58th parallel of latitude been pictured, even by many educated Russians, as a land of frost-bound swamp, stunted vegetation and a starved population. Actually, it is a country possessing wonderful natural resources, supporting, as I think I have already shown, a thriving, hardy, lovable people and only awaiting development. This latter the war, very probably, will accomplish.

The ignorance of the British nation about things commercial in Russia is truly amazing. It seems as though the average merchant, who surely should be cognisant of the merits of possible markets, is more ready to deal with a South American republic like Guatemala, and is more earnest in his efforts to cater for the needs of the inhabitants of that republic, than to attempt to understand the wants

of Russia's millions and the requirements of a land covering one-seventh of the entire surface of the globe. In the year 1907, through the medium of the Journal of the Canadian Bankers' Association, I attempted to arouse interest in the possibilities of trade between Siberia and Canada. The late Sir Edward Clouston, President of the Bank of Montreal, was kind enough to send for me to express his great interest in my theoretical propositions and told me that he himself believed emphatically what I had written, but that to Canadians, as to the rest of the British Empire, Russia and Siberia were but geographical expressions. Since then a great deal of water has passed under the bridge, quite a number of books by authors with far abler pens than mine have described Russia as it is, or as it ought to be, but mostly they have eschewed what, after all, is the most important material factor, that dealing with commerce. In order to make my remarks consecutive, and I hope clear, I propose dealing with the subject in this chapter under two distinct headings: (1) The possibilities of the port of Archangel in the future. (2) The value of Archangel Province and the northern portions of its contiguous neighbours both to the Russian Empire and possibly to Great Britain. The question of the possibilities of Archangel as an important port presents a peculiar and very interesting aspect. This is no modern harbour, but a port which owes its very existence to an English seaman, "Chancellor," and which for many years acted as Customs station for the then flourishing town of Cholmogory, some fifty miles upriver from Archangel on the northern Dwina. Increase of draught in the vessels employed and intricacies of naviga-

tion gradually took away from Cholmogory its original glory, and to-day nothing remains but a decaying hamlet, the inevitable church, and a breed of cattle which I believe is famous in the north of Russia. Commerce and trade shifted to the Customs port, eventually christened Archangel, after the name of its patron saint St. Michael and of the church built in his honour by Peter the Great. Without going into wearisome historical data it thereon rapidly increased in importance and prior to the Crimean War obtained the zenith of its activity. At that time its English population was numbered by hundreds and the "English Company" in the then St. Petersburg not only built a church, but also a vicarage, at the present day used as the Consulate, and maintained an English chaplain. But the Crimean War hit the port a staggering blow. Those British, who more than any others had contributed to the welfare and prosperity of the town, were forced to leave as alien enemies and quite naturally never returned. From that time onwards the trade and commerce lessened, and it almost seemed as though Archangel and its possibilities had been forgotten in Petrograd owing to more pressing questions of importance elsewhere. Every year fewer British ships visited the port and the carrying trade passed more and more into the hands of the Germans. This same phenomenon has been observable in other parts of the world in which the British merchant has not kept abreast of the times, as notably in Constantinople and on the Asiatic coast of Turkey where the Deutsche Levant Linie have undercut their competitors and, metaphorically speaking, have scooped the pool.

But in spite of Teuton mothering the decline of

Archangel continued. As a commercial harbour it was in no way kept abreast of the times and the town to-day still remains isolated from the rest of the country, since its connecting link with the "Mainland of Russia"—if I may use such an expression—is an antiquated narrow-gauge railway of about four hundred miles in length. At its terminus, the town of Vologda, it touches the Perm-Petrograd section of the Siberian railway which is, of course, of Russian standard gauge. The vexatious delays consequent upon the necessary transhipment of goods can be imagined, and the initial step towards bringing Archangel into the ranks of first-class ports must be the alteration of that gauge to standard and possibly the doubling of the line. It would be absurd as well as ungracious to minimise the difficulties which had to be overcome in the initial construction of this railway. As an engineering feat, I believe, it is almost unique, mile after mile having to be laid across the tundra through a sparsely inhabited country where skilled labour was non-existent. But unfortunately the enterprise, as it originated, was a private one financed in Germany. Presumably the difference of gauge was necessitated by monetary considerations, although the policy was suicidal as regarding the development of Archangel. And, still further, the municipality of the town proved themselves hopelessly shortsighted when they refused to sell any site for the railway station itself, within the limits of the town, under the most exorbitant and absurd figure. Therefore, to-day, as I have already pointed out, the railway station stands on the left bank of the Dwina River and the town on the right, causing constant delay, great expense and incessant

confusion. In addition, during the three or four days when the ice in the river is breaking up, the town is completely isolated. It must be emphasised, however, that this ridiculous and arbitrary action on the part of the municipality was in no way directed by Imperial authority and in fact probably has hitherto discouraged Imperial assistance. The old adage, "God helps those who help themselves" is occasionally interpreted at its proper value by the Russian Government.

In this connection I see, however, from *The Times Russian Supplement* of January, 1915, that a broad-gauge line from Niandoma, a village halfway between Vologda and Archangel, is being connected with the former town and that, by this means, it is hoped to overcome the congestion on the railway consequent on the war. Frankly, it seems a very disappointing semi-solution of the problem. Either the port of Archangel can be made of first-rate importance or it cannot; half-hearted, haphazard makeshifts such as that above indicated do not betoken the realisation by Russia of the importance of Archangel to the Imperial Empire. Far better to ignore altogether than to foster fair illusions.

Archangel, with its shipping suburb of Solombola is roughly thirty-four miles from the sea. There is a bar at the mouth of the Dwina allowing of a draught of about nineteen feet at high water, this only with constant dredging. There is another channel of the river, however, which, in the opinion of many seamen, could be made safer and easier. Lying westward, it would avoid the bar above mentioned but finance seriously hinders its adoption. At present ships can load, as a rule,

at the sawmills which line the banks of the main channel without great difficulty, but general cargo and grain are usually handled from lighters, an expensive and oftentimes lengthy operation since the labour is not always forthcoming.

I left Archangel, homeward bound, before the war had been more than ten weeks in progress. Even then able-bodied labour was scarce, and I cannot help but think that the ensuing huge collections of war stores imported from England must have proved a grave problem to those in authority. In fact I know, through private channels, that hundreds of tons of material lay for months before they could be dealt with, and that the handling of heavy pieces of merchandise was greatly impeded through everything having to be accomplished by means of manual labour. But finally, to return to the *ante bellum* condition of the port; it has only to be added that hitherto navigation has never been possible between the middle of October and the middle of May or say, roughly, a period of about seven months. Again, however, the stress of war has proved beneficial, and the introduction of powerful ice-breakers, including one bought from the Canadian Government, has made it possible to keep the port open as late as December, thus prolonging its annual utility by probably eight weeks, —a consideration of the greatest value. At the same time, however, it must be remembered that the winter of 1914–5 was an extraordinarily mild one and it would, in my opinion, be most unwise to count upon a continuance of such exceptional conditions.

That the demand for better wharfage at Archangel and increased dock accommodation is not lightly advanced may best be judged by the com-

mercial activity of the little river station of Kotlass, some three hundred and eighty miles up the Dwina from Archangel.

Count Engelhardt, of whose writings I have made mention, realised early during his Governorship of Archangel Province that Siberia badly needed an outlet for its grain, the sale of which might otherwise be crippled by the enormous expense of its haulage to a Baltic port. He advocated the construction of a line from Viatka, on the previously mentioned Perm-Petrograd railway, to this hamlet as an alternative to a more costly enterprise, of which more anon. And, be it said, his confidence has been abundantly justified. The line was built and, in spite of every natural and not a few artificial disabilities, it has secured a goodly portion of the Siberian grain trade. To be precise, it is estimated that during the year 1914 four million poods (about sixty-four thousand tons) had been collected there for shipment abroad, chiefly to England. At present this grain is loaded at Kotlass in huge barges, which are towed seaward until Archangel is reached, when they lie alongside the ocean-going craft. Again there is delay and again the ever-recurring labour difficulty. Both at Kotlass and Archangel grain elevators are conspicuous by their absence. Hence, there can be no doubt that the figures given could be greatly augmented even with such inconveniences as have been described, and thus it stands to reason that were a through route opened up from Siberia to Archangel, were a more progressive policy adopted by the Archangel municipality, supported necessarily in its turn by Ministerial approbation, as evidenced by coin of the realm, the promoters of the scheme, were

they Government administrators or private financiers, could look forward confidently to an adequate return upon their prime capital outlay. And this without taking into consideration the untapped sources of wealth lying dormant in the province of Archangel and its contiguous territory, upon which I now propose briefly to touch.

Archangel is the largest of the Russian "European Governments," extending as it does from the Norwegian frontier to the confines of Siberia and including all the littoral of Northern Russia in Europe. It embraces an area of approximately 742,080 square versts (about 326,096 square miles), 45 per cent of which is forest land. There is only the one large town of Archangel with its 22,800 inhabitants, and the total population, nomadic and otherwise, is estimated at ·6 per square verst (281·22 acres). I have before pointed out that the original opening-up of this vast territory was due in no small degree to monastic enterprise. But although by this means the country was, so to speak, appropriated by Russia some centuries ago, the growth and development of this region has been naturally slow. Absence of convenient means of communication, the tremendous distances to be covered and severe climatic conditions all militated against its speedy colonisation with the result, as always happens when man is engaged in a stern struggle with nature, that the population has become hardy, vigorous and resourceful. It would be impossible anywhere to find better specimens of the human race than Russia possesses in this province, a factor which will prove of tremendous value as its development proceeds.

It is in connection with a river called the

Vichegda, the chief tributary of the Dwina, that the promise of a remarkable and rapid industrial development seems to be justified. As rivers go, the Vichegda is a considerable stream ; it meanders along nearly due westward from its source in the foot-hills of the Northern Urals and joins its parent waters at Kotlass. Navigation thereon is somewhat impeded by constantly shifting sandbanks, but early in the season small steamers ply as far as a hamlet called Ust Kalom (Ust in Russian signifies "mouth of" as applied to a river). The region around Ust Kalom is especially rich in valuable timber, there being miles and miles and miles of absolutely virgin or scarcely explored forest. Some idea of the magnitude of this area may be gathered from the fact that the forestry officials of Ust Kalom have superintendence of a territory greater than that of Ireland. Incidentally, some twenty miles further upstream, there is another of those curious, isolated monastic outposts, one of the features of Northern Russia, at Kerchemsk.

Now the source of the Vichegda is in close proximity to the sources of two other important rivers, the Kama and the Petchora, and this region is the chief stronghold of that curious race, the Zirians, about whom I have said something in Chapter V. The upper reaches of the Kama intertwine to such an extent with the upper reaches of the Petchora that there is through water communication by several routes which are navigable, however, only by launches, but which with the expenditure of money could be made serviceable for small river steamers. This would actually render possible an inland voyage from Astrakan on the Caspian Sea to the Arctic Ocean—

a fascinating possibility to contemplate! Similarly the Vichegda has numerous tributaries along its right bank which extend like the tentacles of an octopus and weave themselves round the tributaries of the Petchora.

Thus it will be seen that in this remote district lie the sources of three great rivers, while it is likewise the junction of the three northern provinces of Archangel, Perm and Vologda. It is this area which, even from the scanty reports of occasional prospectors coupled with the shrewd criticisms of its Zirian inhabitants, would appear to offer an untouched and almost illimitable field for industrial and mining operations and would seem to justify, additionally, the plea for direct railway communication between Siberia and Archangel. At present, railhead lies, roughly, some hundreds of versts distant, roads are few and travelling difficult. On the other hand, climatically, the district is not so extreme as the imagination naturally paints it; if the winters are cold, they are healthy, while the summer comes without prelude and, except for the mosquitoes, is quite delightful—this from May to October. In fact the upper reaches of the Kama offer scenery of a peculiarly friendly type, not at all dissimilar to the broad sweeps of countryside one meets with in England. Speaking from a personal experience of the eastern portion of Canada, I should say that this region was altogether more attractive and not so extreme in climate.

At Tcherdin on the Kama, the head of steamer navigation, I chanced to meet a tug-boat owner with whom I became upon friendly terms. He belonged to a type often met with in Siberia and the Ural district; considerably self-opinionated,

NORTHERN DWINA. TIMBER RAFT WITH "LIVING" HUT.

A TYPICAL RUSSIAN POST-HOUSE.

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he was quite prepared to back his judgment to an extent which to the outsider savoured of pig-headed obstinacy. From him I gleaned much about the potential wealth of this area. He possessed a mining claim on the upper reaches of the Petchora and offers had already been made to him by Russian promoters. They had not reached his figure, however, and he was adamantine in his determination not to sell at one kopeck below his price. His attitude surprised me since he was a man of inconsiderable means. His explanation was simple enough however, he believed in the future. "It stands to reason," he said in effect, "that the value of this stretch of country cannot remain much longer unknown; every year sees fresh bits of Russia opened up and by and by the railway is bound to come this way. Of course, at present it is out of the way, but look at the places you English go to in search of gold. Why, a trip to the Petchora River is nothing of a journey compared to the Klondike and doesn't take a quarter of the time. And let me tell you this, when I run short of cash I go up to my claim and do a little hand-panning, so you see I have a small bank all my own. Then in addition to gold there is platinum, I haven't got any on my claim but I know those who have it in paying quantities. Then again there is the oil on the Uchta . . . and the place has never even been properly prospected."

His final remark brings me to another discovery in this region of enormous potential value. Many years ago the dwellers on the River Uchta, a tributary of the Petchora, which in its turn connects with the Wym, a small tributary of the Vichegda, observed with something akin to consternation that

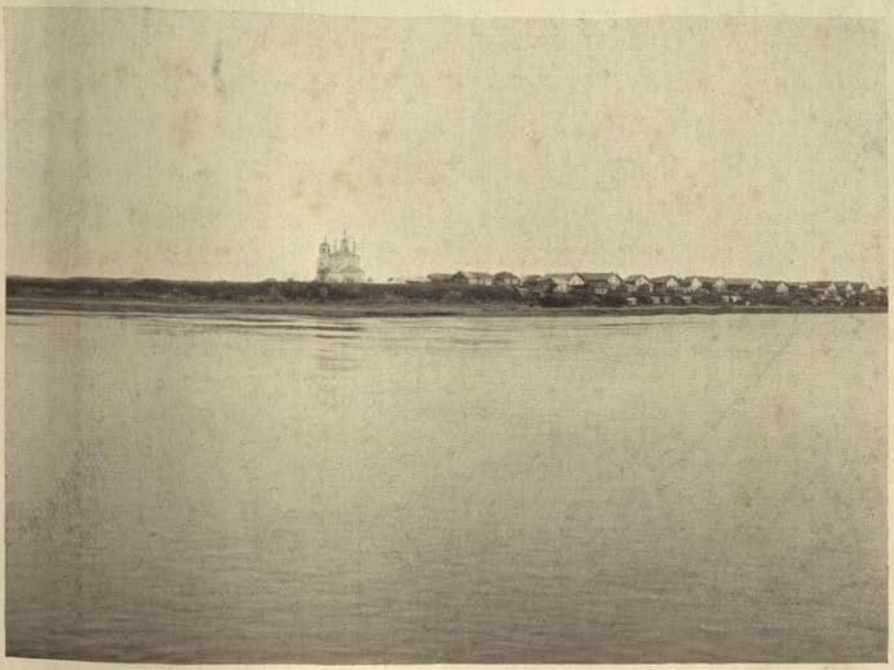
during even the hardest winter the water of the river remained unfrozen. It was long before the solution of the mystery was found to be due to the presence of oil.

Of the date of the first prospecting I am ignorant, but the *Russian Year Book* (1914 edition) states that four wells have been sunk and that the productivity of two of them amounts to one ton per diem. The concluding sentence of the above report is as follows: "Notwithstanding that Uchta oil has been known since the middle of the eighteenth century, it is not yet decided at what spot commercial petroleum lies." That somewhat scanty information I can supplement with the statement that, hitherto, the prospecting has been of the most casual type and that only one foreign engineer, a Swede, has so far visited the district and made a cursory examination. At the same time it is apparent that this new oil-field must have aroused considerable interest in certain quarters, since I learnt upon fairly good authority that the enterprising firm of Nobel had already staked claims in the field as recently as the latter end of 1913. No special pleading is needed to emphasise the importance of this oil-field, situated as it is in the northern part of Russia, and far removed from any possibilities of external disturbance, such as war. But, of course, its exploitation, and indeed the development of the whole district which has been mentioned, depends upon easy and cheap means of transport and is a powerful argument in favour of a Sibero-Archangel railway which would pass right through it. In point of fact the importance of the whole question has at length been appreciated, at any rate unofficially that is to say, private

syndicates have come forward with offers for the construction of such a line, one of the most " firm " having been of American origin.

It seems reasonable to suppose that the war may expedite the whole matter since, as I have already shown, the importance of the port of Archangel is bound to increase immeasurably, if only practical common-sense has its say and fascinating theories are ruled out of court. A through and speedy route from the grain-fields of Western Siberia to Archangel should of itself promise a dividend on capital expenditure, let alone all other considerations. As to the route which should be followed there is not much doubt. On the other side of the Urals, almost diametrically opposite to the area of which I have been speaking, are situated the tremendous works of the Boguslavsky Company, one of the greatest, if not the greatest undertaking of the kind in the whole of Russia. Here some thirty thousand men find employment, and the enterprise includes coal mines, copper mines, timber forests, iron and steel works, rolling mills for rails and immense blast furnaces. They are connected with the Siberian railway by their own line which joins the Russian State railways at Goroblagodatska. From the terminus of this line at the company's works at Nadejdinsky to Tcherdin is about two hundred and fifty versts (one hundred and seventy miles), in a nearly due westerly direction, and it so happens that this route across the Urals is a comparatively easy one, though it is estimated that a million sterling would be required for the construction of this portion of the railway. The route thence to Archangel offers no engineering difficulties of any kind and would

run roughly in a north-westerly direction via Ustwym on the Vichegda, which place would be connected by pipe-line with the Uchta oil-field. Needless to say the Boguslavsky Company have already actively associated themselves with the proposition, and it seems probable that in the event of the Government giving their sanction for the construction of the railway, this concern will secure the concession, which is a valuable one, including as it does the ownership of a strip of land ten versts wide on either side of the line. The total cost of the scheme has been estimated at about eight million pounds—not a stupendous figure when it is remembered that the distance to be covered, as the crow flies, is approximately eleven hundred versts (seven hundred and thirty-two miles). Timber, the Siberian grain and butter trade, the precious metals, coal, iron, copper, oil, what more could the heart of the most exacting and pessimistic traffic-manager demand from his point of view? And such latent possibilities, if realised, might be expected to make strong appeal to the appetite of the prospector, of the promoter, and of the public. True, there exists the labour difficulty, but this ought to be easy to overcome. From the congested areas in Southern Russia the peasants are being encouraged to emigrate in their thousands to the remoter parts of Siberia. And, be it said, they prove most excellent colonists and are growing up a fine, independent branch of the Russian people. Hence it seems only reasonable to suppose that these same emigrants, given the opportunity, would appreciate the possibilities of a new home nearer the centre of their former activities and nearer to the heart of their native land.



NORTHERN DWINA. A TYPICAL RIVER VILLAGE.

VIATKA. THE RIVER VIATKA FROM THE TOWN CLUB.

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Thus it is no exaggeration to say that the construction of this railway would be of the greatest importance strategically, politically, industrially, commercially and sociologically. It would open up a neglected portion of Russia to the vivifying influences of competition with the outer world, it would provide a short cut to the sea for Siberian products, it would change the town of Archangel from a "sleepy hollow" into a bustling, first-class port, it would transform the province of the same name from a lonely remoteness into an excellent area for farmers and colonists, it would tap the sources of the Vichegda, the Petchora and the Kama, developing their latent riches, and finally it would stimulate the existing inhabitants of this region to fresh efforts and would hold out to them untold promise for the future. No doubt adverse criticism of the idea has already been levelled by those interested in some other sphere of action, and I must reiterate what I said earlier, namely, that Russian railway construction is often a matter of personal consideration. And in any case it is always easy to be destructive in comment. This portion of Russia is so strong, so clean and so unspoilt that with the most ordinary goodwill it can be easily moulded into a great "new world" where, if the wind blows strong and cold it is ever tempered by the warmth and friendliness of its people. But there is a greater and more serious aspect connected with this question of what I call the "neglected north." The war has done many things for Russia; it has for ever swept away the vodka monopoly, it has brought Czar and moujik into closer and more sympathetic touch than ever before. It has knit the various races of this great

country into a solid and united whole and it has lessened religious bigotry and sectarian bitterness. And it will have done yet another good work in reminding the Russian Government of its overlooked assets, those pigeon-holed provinces which have no place in the lasting sun of official favour but which, if once liberally encouraged, would become yet one more support to the mighty fabric in which all who love Russia so confidently believe, —the Russian Empire.

CHAPTER XI

EKATERINBURG

EKATERINBURG owes its foundation to the superabundant energies of Peter the Great who, having heard of the fabulous wealth of the Urals both in minerals and precious stones, sent an engineer officer, together with a small expedition, to start a settlement which should have for its purpose the exploitation of these riches. This was in 1723. Under Catherine I, Peter's successor on the throne of Russia, the town was completed and was given its name as an honour to the Empress. Thus it has grown to be recognised as the capital of the Urals, though from an administrative point of view Perm takes precedence.

To-day it is a sort of miner's paradise. Many were the extraordinary stories about it with which we were regaled. A well-informed and much-travelled mining engineer assured us that it was the most expensive town in the Russian Empire, and when asked whether he actually meant to say that it was more ruinous as regards its hotels than Petrograd, he insisted that what would keep one a week in the latter would last a day and a half in the former. So much for the powers of exaggeration and for the willingness of people implicitly to believe whatever they are told. Naturally it is possible to spend money like water in any town if one desires

to do so; witness the Californian miners in San Francisco, where men would gamble a hundred dollars on a race between two flies crossing a pane of glass. And similarly, I heard a story in Ekaterinburg of a miner who, being in his cups, offered an aquamarine in payment for a carafe of vodka. However, it is only just to the town to say that to the normal individual it is no more expensive than any other place in Russia.

Anent our arrival I shall always remember one little incident. For some days it had been impossible even to obtain water to use in our travelling bath. And at Ekaterinburg we had promised ourselves the luxury of a hot plunge, with all the additions which we pictured as being certain to be found in a first-class hotel. Upon arrival at the Palais Royal, to which we had been strongly recommended, as soon as we had been shown to our room we simultaneously uttered the single word "Bath!" To our disgust and disappointment the waiter said, "That is quite impossible. True, we have three bath-rooms, but the baths are being enamelled." Our next demand was for a samovar. "I regret, Barin, it is too early for the samovar." "Beer?" we queried in desperation. "It will be eight o'clock before you can have any beer, Barin." It was now 5.30. We looked round the room. It was exceptionally well furnished and most cosy and comfortable, but there was only one bed. "Can you bring us another bed?" we asked. The waiter shrugged his shoulders, pointed to that in the room, and said, "It is impossible; you can see they are very heavy. I cannot bring one alone, I have no one to help me and, in addition, we have no spare bed."

Ever since then I have been wondering what that waiter had to do which kept him up at 5.30 in the morning. But the incident does point a moral, namely, that even in big towns in Russia a camp bedstead, which with its mattress weighs only twenty pounds and can be carried in a hold-all, is a most useful article with which to travel.

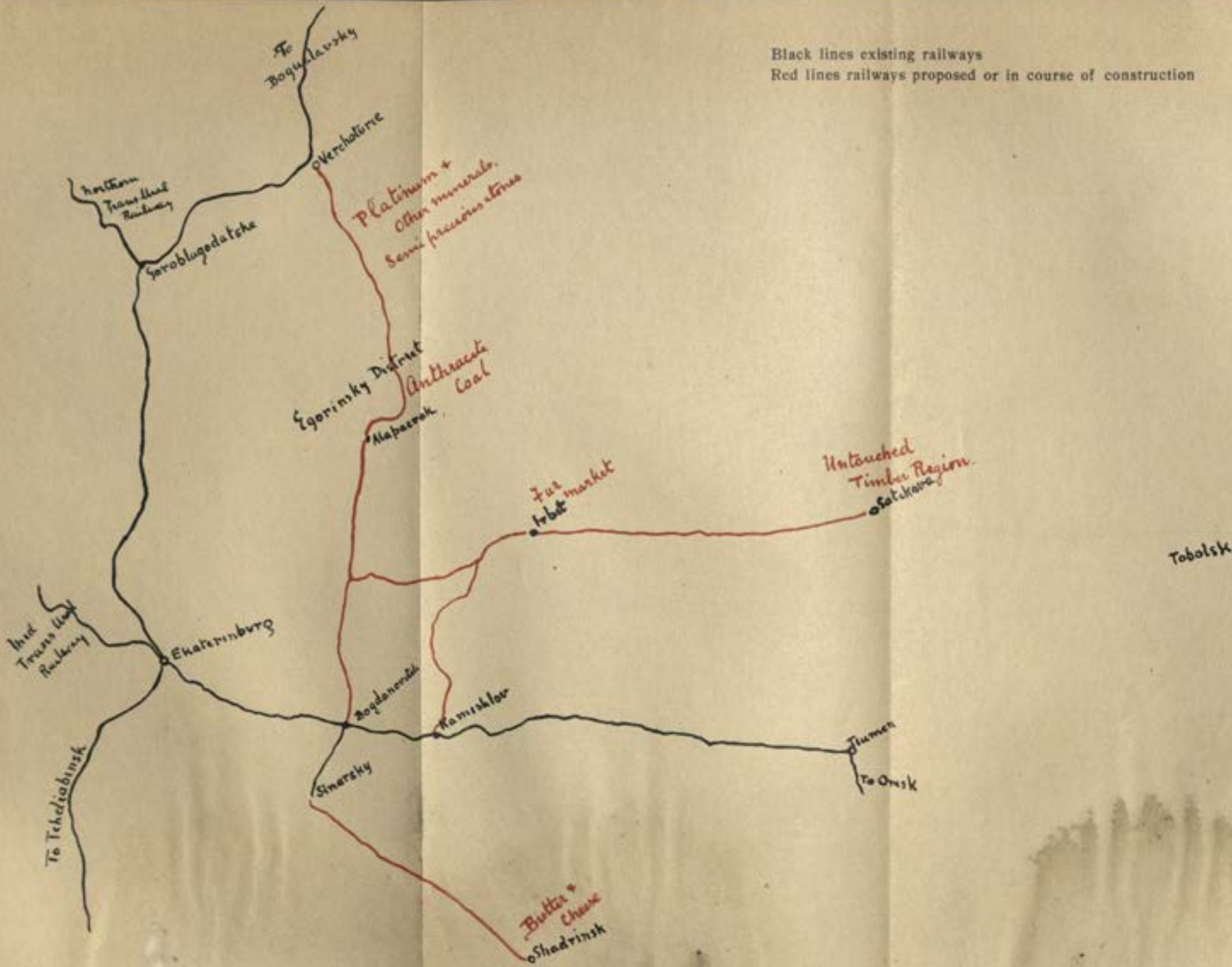
More than any other town Ekaterinburg strikes one as possessing a strongly American flavour, this not because the largest hotel is called "The America." Rather is it because the city has shot ahead and from a municipal point of view has paid attention to business interests rather than to uninteresting questions such as effective sanitation and the needs of the poorer classes!! Thus there is an excellent telephone service, the streets and most of the houses are well lit with electric light, there is a fine opera-house, an enormous railway station and a mining institute in course of construction which is to have accommodation for six hundred students and is, nominally, to cost seven million roubles.

But there are no trams and there are no waterworks. There are numerous restaurants with the usual ladies' orchestras. The cafés keep open all night, and doubtless are responsible for the genial miner finding the place expensive. At each street corner one meets *demi-mondaines*, and it is not hard to see that, vulgarly speaking, everybody is out for the plunder of the unwary. On the other hand, the town garden is really delightfully laid out with trim-looking flower-beds and well-kept lawns, where in the evenings one can eat a meal at a reasonable cost and listen to a remarkably

good string band. Once a week a symphony orchestra, which has the reputation of being one of the finest in Russia, gives a special concert.

And with American optimism the inhabitants expect great things and are making preparations accordingly. The railway station is far too large for existing traffic, would not shame any city in the world, and can compare, on a smaller scale, not unfavourably with the Pennsylvania Station in New York. And this, be it remembered, in a town with a population at the last census of less than 44,000. Baedeker, in its latest edition, gives 75,000 as the figure, a hopeless inaccuracy. Ekaterinburg is deceptive as to its size, because it is planned on a large scale, has many large houses and is run on large lines; in fact, it wants to be thought large, which is really rather a hopeful augury for the future. It means that there is a spirit of enterprise abroad, something in the nature of that aggressive hustle which is irritating to the outsider not immediately concerned in its interests, and which is altogether foreign to the sleepy temperament of the European Russian.

And what are the grounds for this very positive expression of optimistic certainty about the future? In the first place Ekaterinburg stands on the River Isset, a tributary of the great Siberian river, the Irtish. There is a scheme on foot, which I understand has already received considerable attention, including surveys and the drawing up of the financial estimates, for the widening of the Isset River and the linking up of the Volga and the Kama with the Irtish by means of its waters. The value of Russia's waterways is a matter of common knowledge,



Ekaterinburg and its railway connections

though, truth to tell, it is only latterly that their tremendous possibilities have been recognised. Water transport is the cheapest which exists at the present day. Russia, particularly this portion of Russia, is suffering from the need of cheap and easy communication, and were this project accomplished, it would place towns like Nijni Novgorod and Kazan in direct water communication with such great Siberian cities as Omsk, Tomsk and Barnaoul. A glance at a map will give some idea of what this means, a journey of about six thousand miles. Again, Ekaterinburg is the geographical centre of the Ural mining district. This was the *raison d'être* of its genesis, and for nearly two centuries it has, so to speak, acted as parent to all enterprise of that nature. To-day, within easy reach, there are seventy-five ironworks which are operating at a profit, and that number could be multiplied many times, but for the ever-present bogey—means of communication. And, for this very reason, places easy of access, where surface and primitive working have hitherto been carried on, are nearly exhausted. In the opinion of mining engineers, however, new processes and improved machinery would lead to a fresh lease of life in these locations. This applies likewise to many copper claims which are for the moment idle.

The Russians are peculiar in this respect, they hate taking a financial plunge into cold water. In other words, they dislike intensely being obliged to find fresh capital, and hard cash at that, for the installation of new machinery on old works. If the proposition concerns entirely virgin ground, they will deplete their bank balances with the greatest of pleasure, since there is the allurement

of a gamble, and every good Russian loves a game with Chance. But whether it is that they distrust the reports of their own engineers, regarding them as theoreticians rather than as practical men, it is a fact that the exploitation of ancient works on modern lines is not at all a popular proceeding, unless endorsed by the dicta of American or English engineers, flavoured with a touch of material interest, i.e. British money. Then they will come forward, will actively engage themselves in the improvement of their properties, and will make money for all parties concerned. In other words, there is an enormous amount of wealth lying dormant in this region, and after the war Ekaterinburg should begin to experience something of a boom and to justify the jaunty confidence of its people.

Again there is the question of platinum, which, apart from its intrinsic value, offers a certain air of romance because of its comparatively recent entry into the ranks of the precious metals. In this connection figures offer food for thought. Less than forty years ago the price of platinum was 7s. 6d. an ounce; to-day, lucky is the man who can obtain an ounce for £7 10s., an increase of twenty times its former value. Prior to that date it was considered of so little worth that when met with in mining operations it was not infrequently thrown away, while later of so slight account was it held that a platinum coinage was instituted to take the place of the nickel in general use in foreign countries. I need not add that the platinum coins have long since disappeared and that examples of them are only to be found in museums. Now of this metal over ninety per cent of the world's

VIATKA. A STREET SCENE.
Note the booths.

PERM. A BEGGAR.

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supply comes from a comparatively small patch in the region under discussion. The area may be roughly delineated by taking Goroblagodatska as its southern limit, Verchoturie as its northern, the Urals as its western, and a line adjoining the two towns as its eastern boundary. Within this very small circumference the ground has naturally been most carefully prospected and in spots is already worked out. But plenty remains to be done in other quarters which hitherto have not received attention. I have already mentioned claims in the southern reaches of the Petchora, and I have indicated how in the future they may be exploited. But in the northern Urals there are at least two rivers, the Sosva and the Losva, which, having been prospected, are known to be extraordinarily rich, and there seems every reason why other unprospected areas in this neighbourhood should also give promise of wealth in this mineral. The same old difficulties crop up, it is true, difficulty of communication, difficulty of transport, difficulty of labour. But as regards the last, eliminate the first, and at any rate the problem is on the way to being half solved.

I have said little anent copper since the whole world is aware of what the Urals can offer in this respect; all that needs be emphasised is that with increased railway development would come an increased output of copper, and there is no reason why this district should not occupy some day comparatively the same position with copper as it already does with platinum.

Ekaterinburg has for long been renowned for its marbles and semi-precious stones. Probably nowhere in the world can be found jasper and

malachite in such richness and quantity. From the days of Peter the Great onward these sources of supply have been operated upon and after nearly two centuries show no signs of giving out. Through the kindness of the Controller we were permitted to inspect the Imperial factory devoted exclusively to the manufacture of articles from malachite, another factory of a precisely similar description being occupied with jasper. Some idea of the extent of the work carried on can perhaps be gathered from the fact that forty workmen are constantly employed fashioning objects, which range from pen-trays to pillars for the interior of churches. They also make in the malachite factory ornaments from agate, quartz and hornstone of such bewildering beauty and colour that one would not be human were one not envious. We noticed, in particular, a malachite font upon which work was being carried on, and which was being made out of one solid block weighing over seven tons. Incidentally at neither of these factories is anything ever sold, and one imagines that there must be considerable waste, but we were told by the director that a more go-ahead policy would probably be employed before long, when this surplus would be disposed of to the public, which would certainly seem the most normal and businesslike attitude to assume.

Of the quasi-precious stones, numbers are to be found in the neighbourhood of the city. Some versts south a French company is mining for emeralds, with what success I am unaware, and it is from this district that the best aquamarines are obtained. At one time this stone was not in much favour and was procurable at a very

cheap price. The Empress, however, realised its possibilities, and took to wearing it with the result that it has now become a *culte*, and the price has increased an hundredfold. Personally speaking, a fine specimen of an aquamarine seems to be one of the most exquisite gems imaginable. It lacks the hard brilliance of the diamond and gains rather on that account; it is in fact, as the Empress had the wit to discover, a beautiful stone for a beautiful woman.

We were lucky in the choice of our hotel at Ekaterinburg, in spite of our unpleasant first impressions. It turned out to be far and away ahead of any provincial place of the kind we had encountered, and was quite comparable with the best that can be produced in cities like Moscow and Petrograd. Not only was it clean, but the cooking was the acme of perfection of the Russian cuisine. The Russians as a race, that is to say those of education, are extremely discriminating over this question of food; they are not gourmands but gourmets. They prefer to take twenty different tastes from twenty different dishes, rather than to sit down to a square meal of the table d'hôte variety. Moreover, time not being money, it is nothing to them to expend five or six hours over the preparation of some soup or entrée, with the result that the Russian cuisine will make appeal to the most jaded of appetites. And it is probably for this reason that the traveller is inclined to overstrain his digestion when making acquaintance with these Slav dainties. The soups, bortch (Little Russian, made with beetroot) and schi (cabbage soup) were quite the best we ever tasted anywhere in the country, which is most remarkable,

considering that both dishes are national ones, and that even though Ekaterinburg may in the future be an enormous centre of population, at present it is merely a rather out-of-the-way provincial town.

From the point of view of comfort it is badly situated. A perpetual wind whistles down its streets with terrific velocity. One wonders that all the sign-boards are not wrenched from their fastenings and that pedestrians can keep their feet; add to this dense clouds of fine sand which inflame the eyes and which literally bring wheeled traffic to a standstill. It is impossible to see and next to impossible to breathe, all one can do is to turn one's back to the storm and wait for the passing of the fiercest gust. One hears much talk about the wind and dust in Siberian towns; we found them nothing to Ekaterinburg and we were told, moreover, that during the summer months, especially during the morning and early afternoon, these storms are practically incessant.

Having shown some of the future possibilities of the town, I now propose to explain with some little detail the railway campaign which is already in full swing, and which will, if completed, make of Ekaterinburg probably the most important railway centre this side of the Urals, fully justifying the ambitious design of its railway station.

First and foremost a railway is to be constructed direct from Ekaterinburg to Kazan, which will have the effect of linking up the watersheds of the Kama and the Irtish and which, pending the realisation of the Isset canal, will prove of great value in shortening the transit of goods

EKATERINBURG. A GREENGROCER.

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between middle Russia and western Siberia. At present anyone travelling from Ekaterinburg to Kazan must go either via Vologda, an enormous *détour*, or via Tcheliabinsk and Samara. Hence, it may be said that the purpose of this line is the cheap transport of goods and passengers, a matter of considerable importance.

The next railway, and one of probably greater value is that from Ekaterinburg to a small hamlet on the River Tavda of the name of Satikova, a distance of approximately two hundred and forty miles in a north-easterly direction. A glance at a map will show that, were this line extended, its natural terminus would be the ancient city of Tobolsk, which for many centuries has remained isolated from the great world. The particular reason for its construction is the wish of the Government to tap the fringe of an enormous forest belt which extends for hundreds of miles through the Tobolsk Province, and which has hitherto been, so to speak, idle capital, inasmuch as distances and transport difficulties made its practical utilisation impossible. I was told by a man in Ekaterinburg, to use his own expression, that the timber to be found in this part of the country would stagger the most up-to-date timber merchant. This line would presumably pass through the town of Irbit, which is about eighty-five miles from Ekaterinburg itself, and is to be connected, in addition, with the main line from Ekaterinburg to Tiumen by a branch line joining it at the junction of Kamishlov.

Irbit has been known for centuries as the greatest fur market in the world. People talk of Leipsic and Vienna, but the whole Russian fur trade, or

trade of furs from Russia, is arranged in this remote hamlet which, during the month of February, for a fortnight, awakens to life and becomes the clearing-house of furrierdom. Merchants from Chicago, New York, Buenos Aires, London, Paris and Berlin concentrate in Ekaterinburg, and drive in post-sleighs the eighty miles separating them from their goal. Personally I was never in Irbit during fair-time and the rest of the year it is a village of closed houses, but I have been told that for those two brief weeks café chantants abound, with orchestras, singers and dancers. Temporary electric light is installed in the streets, or what pass for streets, while the commercial turnover runs into hundreds of millions of roubles. Irbit taps the whole of northern Siberia; furs reaching its market have been known to take two years *en route*. These are gathered not only from the northern foot-hills of the Urals, but from as far away as the lonely desolation of the Behring Straits. Latterly the market had been collapsing, skins were becoming scarcer, and buyers began to show irritation at the inconveniences to which the journey thither exposed them. Hence the determination to link it up with the outside world, together with the governmental order that no sables should be killed for three years, as from date 1913.

Of course it is totally impossible to supervise the actions of trappers in these regions, but on the other hand the exposure of such skins for sale would probably bring upon the vendor a quick and well-merited punishment. So keen has been the war of extermination upon sables, a war purely commercial in character, be it said,

that at Petrograd it has been found necessary to start a sort of stud for these and other rare fur-clad animals, which has for its *raison d'être* the propagation of their species. In 1914 at Irbit, sables were fetching £4 10s. a skin; this fact is given merely to explode that happy theory that in Russia it is possible to buy the choicest of furs at a knock-down price.

It is a commonplace in England that the war permeates through every channel of our daily life, but it may come as a surprise to many to learn that even the fur trappers of this wild northern waste, the Samoyedes and Ostiaks, will indirectly benefit from its refining influence.

For many, many years the trapper has never come into direct contact with the merchant. There has always been the inevitable middle-man, on this occasion, the Jew. He has faced the dangers of the forest, the dangers of the climate, danger from thieves and escaped exiles, in order to make his profit, which must have worked out at many hundreds per cent. Such legislation as the Truck Act does not exist in this part of the world, and the most portable and most popular substance for barter has hitherto been vodka. It goes without saying that these poor semi-civilised beings could easily be induced to make the most absurd bargains for a few bottles of what was neither more nor less than their liquid ruin. I have heard it expounded many times by Russians, who ought to know, that these northern races would neither have deteriorated nor have decreased in population had it not been for vodka, the price of furs which fetch a king's ransom even at Irbit. But this is happily a

story of a bygone day. When I called this book *The New Russia* I had all these sidelights of the ultimate effect of the war in all its bearings upon the Slav Empire in my mind, and I am not certain that the most happy result will not be the freedom of these folk from the contaminating influence of the middlemen who, robbed of their most powerful agent, will be compelled to treat as honourably as their nature knows how with their clients.

Another line which has already been sanctioned is that from Bogdanovitch, a junction of the Ekaterinburg-Tiumen line, to a place called Alapaevsk, which lies almost due north, and which line probably in the future may be continued as far as Verchoturie. Its present purpose is to make access easy to the Egorinsky district, where there are large seams of anthracite coal, which, remote as they are from railhead are already proving of workable value. The length of the present railway is about ninety miles, a portion of which would serve as the main line to Irbit. The remaining portion, that is to say from Alapaevsk to Verchoturie, would be approximately the same length and would traverse precisely that district in which platinum might be expected to be found, and which hitherto has not been carefully prospected.

Having mentioned the junction of Bogodanovitch I may amplify my remarks and say that from this point a railway already exists to a place called Sinarsky, almost due south, whence a line is under construction to the important town of Shadrinsk, about half-way to Kourgan, a well-known station on the main Trans-Siberian railway. The object of this line is not far to seek.

It is constructed with the idea of opening up a considerable area which produces large quantities of butter, cheese,—this an excellent replica of an English cheddar,—and grain.

Turning now to a purely mineral railway; on the western side of the Urals a line is under construction between the two mining centres of Orsk and Troitsk via Berdiansk, from which point a line will run to Liastvenni, a place of mushroom growth, to the east of Perm, and already connected with the main Perm-Ekaterinburg line. The latter of these lines will run practically parallel with the Ural Mountains, while the former will be the means of opening up rich mining areas hitherto rendered unworkable, owing to lack of means of transport. The two combined will form one of the most important channels of exploitation in the western Urals constructed in the last century. Finally I might mention a line which, though not strictly belonging to this region, may yet indirectly have remarkable influence upon the fortunes of Ekaterinburg, namely, that line already being constructed between Ufa on the main Trans-Siberian Railway and the town of Orenburg. This line, which is likely to be completed long before other more ambitious railway enterprises in Siberia, would make a short route between Siberia and Central Asia, which, though geographically contiguous, are separated by a great gulf, a gulf of unexplored steppe or sandy desert. Its approximate length would be two hundred miles and it would save the traveller probably two thousand.

At such length have I dwelt upon the railway enterprise in this particular portion of Perm

Government, because it seemed to me symptomatic of the tremendous awakening which is occurring in this corner of the Urals and which no doubt accounts for the optimism of the Ekaterinburger. And in this connection one last point crops up.

In her craze for development, a most worthy and excellent craze, be it said, Russia must construct many thousands of miles of such railways as I have described in all parts of her vast empire, and even in cataloguing the efforts being made in this small quarter, the addition of my mileage will already work into some thousands of versts. Now it must be clearly understood that for gigantic enterprises of this character the Russian Empire is most inadequately equipped. It is quite impossible for her, as things are, to construct the rolling stock, engines, bridges, let alone roll the necessary rails, or even make such minor items as pins and fish-plates. Therein lies a great possibility for the energetic foreign contractor. Without a doubt the era of Germany has finished and the dawn of another country which shall work for the making of the New Russia is at hand. British ingenuity, British resource, British friendship and British aid are the simplest and surest keys to the situation. Elsewhere I have dealt more fully with this subject, but when I survey the position and look into the mists of the future, I feel hopeful, and am more or less satisfied that the sanguine citizens of Ekaterinburg have founded their castles, not in the air, but upon the sure rock of a justified conviction.

CHAPTER XII

TIUMEN

THE HEAD OF THE SIBERIAN WATERWAYS

TIUMEN is situated in the great western Siberian plain and its chief claim to interest lies in the fact that it is at this point that river navigation to eastern Siberia has its origin. In England one is so inclined to regard Siberia as an undeveloped country, that it is difficult to realise the enormous extent of its river systems, of which the greatest use is made and upon which it is possible to travel with practically all the comforts of an ocean liner for thousands of miles without the discomforts of pitching and rolling. And be it remarked, even as things are to-day, there still remains room for improvement and expansion which if properly applied will certainly duplicate the means of transport of the country as a whole.

Figures possess a peculiar fascination in connection with distances, that is to say, of distances not realised and which make the reader want to turn to a large-scale map. The river-ways of Siberia offer food for just that reflection. Tiumen is on the River Tura, which joins the River Irtish at Tobolsk and which in its turn is the main tributary of the Ob, from which it branches away some hundred miles south of the town of Berezov. The distance from Tiumen to Tobolsk is about two

hundred and seventy-six miles. From Tobolsk the same steamer takes one swiftly and comfortably to the great capital of western Siberia, Omsk, another seven hundred and fifty-eight miles. Thence, without further change, it is possible to travel along the same river to Semipalatinsk in the far south of Siberia, an additional six hundred and eighty-eight miles, making the total distance from Tiumen one thousand seven hundred and twenty-two miles. Incidentally, if one likes to change steamers at Semipalatinsk, it is then possible to continue the journey southwards via the settlement of Ust Kamenogorsk, at which place an English company is operating coal and copper mines, to Topolev Muis (Cape Topolev), on Lake Zaisan not far from the Chinese frontier, another four hundred and sixty miles, making a distance from Tiumen of approximately two thousand three hundred miles. And even then navigation need not cease, and the traveller who is armed with a Chinese passport can continue by light-draft steamer right into Chinese territory.

But from Tobolsk it is also possible to journey by steamer to the important town of Barnaoul, situated on the River Ob itself, a distance of eighteen hundred and fourteen miles and again on to another town which is already a thriving community, one of the greatest butter centres in Siberia, Büsk, which is distant from Tobolsk one thousand nine hundred and fourteen miles and from Tiumen no less than two thousand three hundred and twenty-nine miles. When it is remembered that the distance from New York to Liverpool is only three thousand miles, some idea can be gained of the enormous extent of country which this river

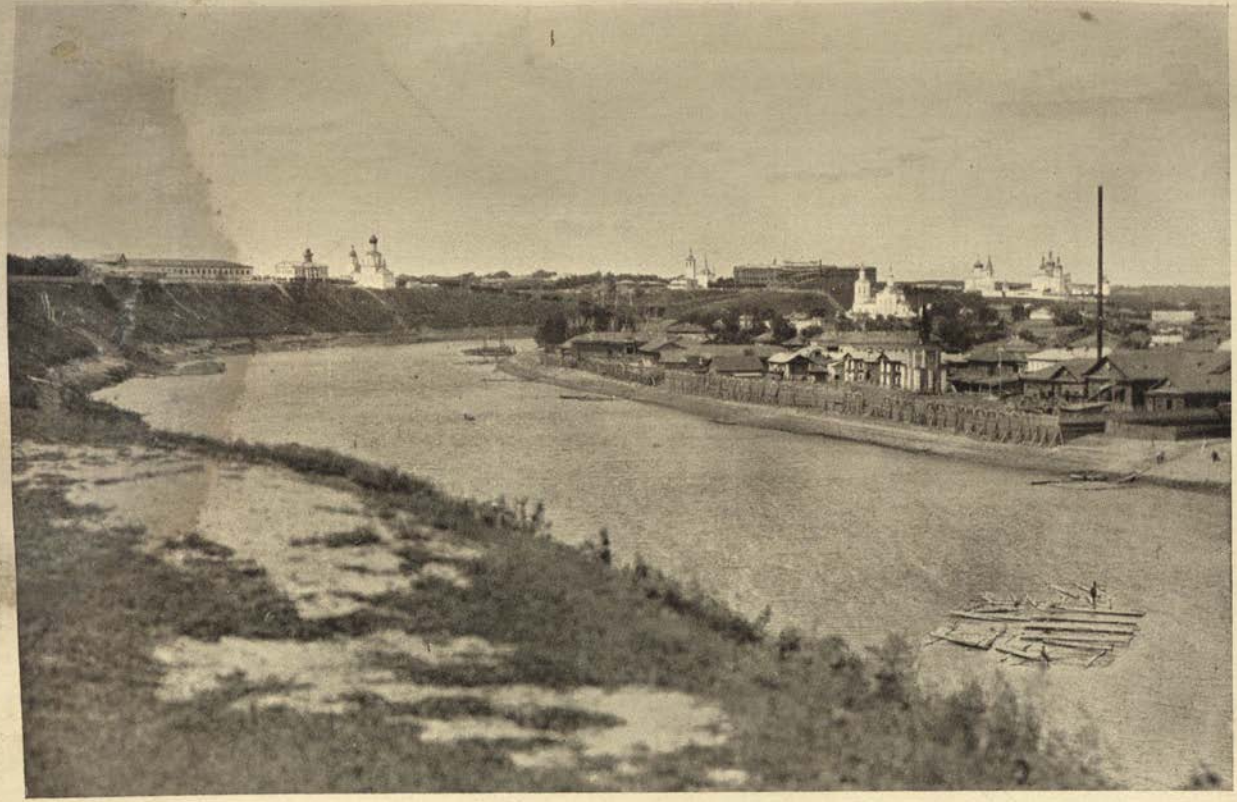
navigation covers, and the immense part it must play in the social life of a people who for the most part are removed from a railway by great distances.

The Russian well knows how to look after his creature comforts, and all the steamers, even the smaller ones, offer a degree of luxury which is surprising to the Westerner who only thinks of Siberia as a synonym for dirt and discomfort. Marvellous to relate, the boats are usually most punctual. They are both clean and commodious, the two-berth cabins being furnished with every accommodation which could be humanly expected. There are bath-rooms with hot and cold water, a lounge and reading-room combined, an excellent dining-room, in every particular the equal of that found in a first-class hotel, while the decks are sufficiently spacious to allow of chairs and still leave a decent promenade for passengers. Finally, I might mention that the captain has a wheel-house situated on the top deck of the ship, to which he usually asks his personal friends,—in this respect we were most lucky,—and from which it is possible to get the most glorious view. Such is river travel to-day in Siberia.

In the last chapter I commented upon the proposed canal which, via the River Isset, should connect the Rivers Kama and Irtish. In continuity of that same project there has also been proposed and the ground has already been surveyed, another canal which should link up the river Ket, a tributary of the Ob, with another great stream, the Yenisei, connecting with it some thirty miles above the town of Yeniseisk. This would open up through communication, via the latter river, with Minussinsk, a most important steppe town, and by

a tributary of the Yenisei, the Angara, with Irkutsk, the biggest town in central Siberia, situated nearly on the banks of Lake Baikal. The Angara is a curious river. It is fed partially by the waters of Lake Baikal and partially by the Yenisei, and for a considerable distance from both ends there is already steamboat navigation. But about midway between these two points the river shoals greatly, and is at present unnavigable, though this might be easily overcome and a permanent channel established. Were these projects carried out, there would be a continuous waterway from Astrakan to Lake Baikal, a distance of approximately seven thousand miles. Nowhere else in the world can such a prodigious system of waterways be found, and the whole scheme is fascinating for just that very reason,—its stupendous immensity.

Tiumen itself is a commonplace enough steppe town. It lies in the heart of an extremely rich agricultural region, and in the early summer its setting is one of rare beauty. No one who has not seen it can realise the wonderful charm of the great rolling Siberian plain, when it is carpeted with its gorgeous covering of wild flowers. These flourish in a profusion which combine to form a colour scheme of exceptional fascination. Daisies, buttercups, the reddest of red clover, great tangled masses of wild roses, bluebells, foxgloves, forget-me-nots of the deepest blue, fat yellow marsh-mallows and huge maroon-coloured flowering thistles, literally jostle one another in their fight for breathing space. The exuberance of the growth is emblematic of the character of the inhabitants here. The long, stern winter is forgotten, and during the months of the



TIUMEN. GENERAL VIEW.

To face p. 224.

enervating summer both individual and flower alike seem determined to make the best of the glorious weather and profit by it according to their natures.

Within, the town of Tiumen is not attractive except when seen in the cool of the evening with the afterglow of the sun in the west and the silver streak of the river winding circuitously through the green-clothed plain. If it rains, and it frequently does—hence probably the luxuriance of the vegetation — the streets become morasses, and the side walks, where they exist, almost impossible upon which to walk, owing to the peculiar slipperiness of the mud. It is a striking feature this mud; I have seen one of the local cabs skid all over the place, first to one side of the road and then to the other, becoming positively unmanageable. It is also by no means uncommon to see a moujik so embedded in it as to be obliged to get his companions to extricate him, not improbably with the loss of his boots. Add to this, flies in myriads endowed with the most Napoleonic persistency, and it can be imagined that life within the confines of the town is not of the most pleasant during the summer months. Happily, however, we found a humble little hotel, which, without any pretensions, proved both clean and comfortable. Our meals as usual we took at the railway station buffet, and in this connection I am reminded of a wedding feast which we witnessed there.

The big centre table was occupied by the party, bride and groom, best man, bride's father and guests. The bridegroom was a big, heavy man with a drooping black moustache, tremendously

oiled hair and a conspicuous double chin. He sported something in the nature of a dinner jacket, but which looked like an abbreviated frock-coat, check trousers, patent-leather shoes, an evening white waistcoat and Scotch plaid tie with a large pin stuck in it. The bride, for whom we felt genuinely sorry, was a tall, pretty, refined-looking, fair-haired girl with wonderful teeth. A white scarf was flung over her head, and she was wearing a rather handsomely embroidered black silk coat over a *décolleté* white frock. She seemed to feel her position acutely, and one could not help wondering what the family history was which had tied such a dainty specimen of womanhood to such a sensual, gross beast of a man. Champagne was flowing in rivers, plus beer, plus vodka. Both the bridegroom and the best man grew rapidly rather the worse for wear and eventually in loud tones invited all the spectators to drink to the bride's health, much to her obvious annoyance and embarrassment, shared also, it must be added, by the other ladies in the party, who busied themselves in whispering to her words of encouragement. The bride's father was rather like the bride's father in a melodrama; he was tearful, even occasionally he broke into loud sobs, the result, I presume, of remorse and champagne. He struggled over to our table and offered us a glass of champagne each. We thanked him profusely, and assured him that we never drank it. "Never mind," sobbed the father, nudging my elbow, "keep it over here, it will be one more for me, by and by."

At another table sat a curious group who, in the intervals of a game of cards where much money must have changed hands, judging by the constant

jingling of silver, watched the proceedings at the central table with that curious Oriental passivity which always makes one long to know the nature of the thoughts passing through their minds.

One was a Turkoman, slender, pale and delicate, with a cap shaped like a fur beehive. There was a fat Tartar, probably he was winning, since he was the only one of the party who seemed engrossed in the proceedings. And there were two Chinamen as a complement, who drank innumerable bottles of beer with a most disconcerting speed, and with a solemnity in comparison with which the expression of an owl would be positively raffish.

Coffee and liqueurs next occupied the attention of the wedding-party. The best man tacked irregularly round the table and attempted to kiss the bride, who skilfully avoided him. By this time the bridegroom was too overcome to protest. Then arrived the train to Omsk. The father, weeping bitterly, was escorted by the whole throng to a second-class compartment, and as the train steamed away he was still leaning half-way out of the window, shouting frenzied recommendations and commands to his offspring. After this the bride and groom drove away back to Tiumen, the town is about four miles away from the station, and the last we saw of the best man was of that individual trying ineffectually to understand the intricacies of the restaurant account which he was called upon to settle, and which apparently he experienced considerable difficulty in comprehending.

Tiumen is also, so to speak, the gateway of that mysterious north which lies east of the Ural mountains, and the inaccessibility of which renders

it even to this day practically a *terra incognita.* Following the river Irtish to its junction with the Ob, and proceeding still further north along the latter river, the first settlement of any importance to be encountered is that of Berezof. This place, which to-day numbers about 1200 inhabitants, has long possessed an unenviable notoriety, since it has been chosen by successive governments for many centuries as a favourite spot for administrative exile. In this connection it may be well to point out that the political prisoner sent to Siberia, unless he has been proved guilty of crimes of violence, suffers no greater hardship than being compelled to live in a certain locality. If he has the money, he can occupy the best house in the place, should the owner be ready to let it. And similarly, he can buy books, keep up communication with the outside world—though naturally there would be some censorship of his correspondence—and he can devote himself to the development of any hobby of which he is fond. These exiles have given of their best to Siberia and archæologically, geologically, zoologically, and botanically the fruits of their researches will remain when the works of men more prominent in the public eye at present have been forgotten. But it goes without saying that the places chosen for these exiles are usually far removed from the main thoroughfares of life, places to which access is not easy, and from which departure is still more difficult. Such a place is Berezof.

Perhaps its most distinguished visitor was that Prince Mechnikoff who, after the death of Peter the Great, obtained through the influence of that monarch's widow, Catherine I, whose lover he had

previously been, tremendous power and a control over the affairs of the country out of all proportion to the rights of his position. His scheming went so far that he obtained from Catherine a promise that his daughter should be formally betrothed to her heir, Peter II. Catherine I, however, died at an inconvenient moment and Peter II quickly proved himself *intransigeant*. He was tired of Mechnikoff's supervision, and equally tired of his wife-to-be. Egged on by his aunt, Elizabeth, herself a future Empress, but at that time a wonderfully pretty slip of a girl of seventeen, with a stroke of the pen he disgraced his former mentor. Mechnikoff was deprived of all his dignities and orders, and in 1727 was banished to Berezof. Two years later he died there. Considering the difficulties which must have attended his journey thither and the hardships of life there, at that date, it is really surprising that he lived so long.

Coming with a jump to practically the present day, General Lapoukhin, former Chief of the Police in Petrograd, who was banished for being involved in the police scandals in which Azeff was concerned, was forced to make this his home for two or three years and was, I believe, accompanied by his family and even by their English governess.

North again of Berezof is a veritable no-man's-land, in spite of the fact that it was absorbed into the Russian Empire long before the rest of Siberia was conquered. In the middle of the sixteenth century it was known as Obdurie, and was specifically mentioned as one of the many subordinate titles of the Czar. The word Obdor (translated, it means, the mouth of the Ob) is of Zirian origin, and would seem to show that this race in the hey-

day of their prosperity must have overrun this portion of northern Siberia. Its capital, if such a term may be applied to a collection of huts, is Obdorsk. Latterly it has attained to a certain spurious notoriety, owing to the fact that for some years past the Russian Government has been considering the advisability of constructing a railway thence to a settlement called Medynsk, two hundred and sixty miles west by north on Chaipudorska Bay, on the shores of the Arctic Ocean. To give its position more accurately this bay lies east of the Petchora Bay, and is intersected by the 60th degree of longitude. The object of this line is the facilitation of traffic from Western Europe direct to the Ob. At the present moment communication is much impeded owing to the treacherous Kara Straits, the short time during which navigation remains open in the estuary of the Ob and the proved danger of such voyages.

As a matter of fact, the project is one of those delightfully illusory conceptions which are often to be met with in Russia. As long ago as 1907 I remember being shown a pamphlet in Moscow concerning this very proposition, and therein it was stated that surveys had already been made and estimates prepared. In a semi-official publication for 1914 I come across the statement that "authority has been granted for the carrying out of such surveys"!!! But be that as it may, I personally maintain that far better value for money is to be obtained by the suggested Sibero-Archangel Railway than by the fantastic scheme above outlined. I do not hesitate to say that the time will come when it might possess distinct and positive value, but, equally, I do unhesitatingly

aver that the time is not yet. The allocation of fresh railway construction within the Russian Empire must be a most puzzling undertaking to a responsible statesman, if only that the call for it is practically universal and the justification almost everywhere.

On the other hand, there can be no doubt of the great potential wealth of this whole region, a region, by the way, seldom if ever visited by a western European.

Elsewhere in this volume I have mentioned meeting an Englishman who had had it in mind to cross the Urals from the neighbourhood of Berezof to Ust Tsilma on the Petchora River in Archangel Province. By profession he was a mining engineer. Accompanied by a friend and some dozen Russian labourers, they started off with the idea of examining some of the tributaries, which flow into the Ob towards its mouth, for gold and other minerals. They found plenty of alluvial gold, but the great difficulty which militated against its immediate exploitation was the eternal labour question. And in this connection he told me of an incident which throws one more sinister sidelight upon the politicals.

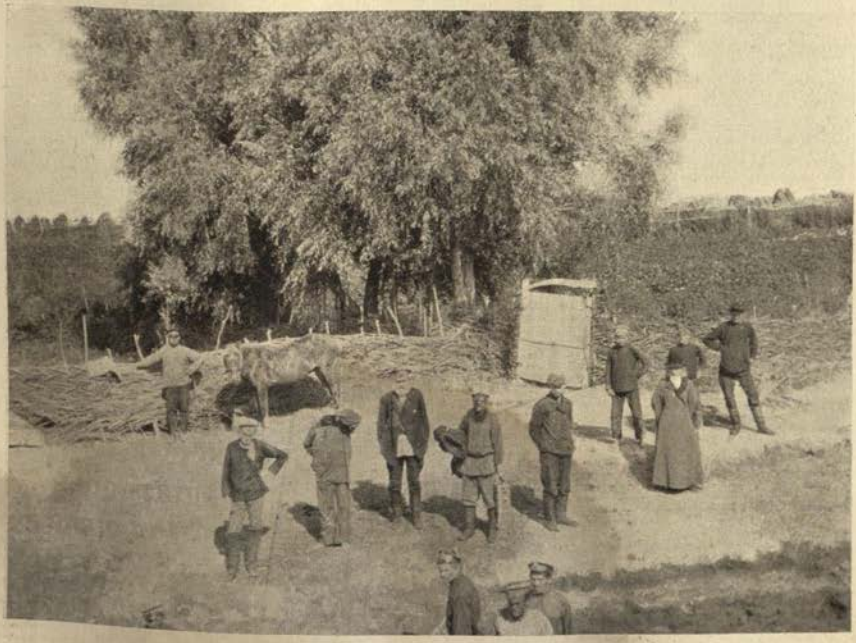
At Berezof the expedition naturally aroused interest. A number of these political offenders came forward and offered their services. My informant said he would accept the offer with pleasure, adding, "I will pay you at the same rate at which I am paying my present labourers, £3 10s. a month. I cannot very well pay you more, it would not be fair." Thereupon the exiles protested with the greatest bitterness that nothing would induce them to accept less than £10 a month. In

parenthesis, their employment was to be the usual manual labour performed by an unskilled working man. It goes without saying that thereupon my friend decided that he did not require them. These men then seem to have lost their heads completely; they talked of stopping the expedition, and went so far as to threaten its leader with physical violence. Small wonder that appeal was made to the police authorities, and that they were warned of what the consequences would be if they persisted in their folly. And these are typical of the people upon whom, in England, a great deal of sentiment is wasted.

Another incident which was also told me anent this same expedition was the case of a man who was obliged to travel back three hundred miles up-stream to Tobolsk to purchase a mosquito net, so terrible did these pests prove to be. In my friend's own words, "The chap was going mad from want of rest and sleep." But with proper equipment I can imagine no more interesting trip than this across the Urals by the only road which is known to exist, a track made by the millionaire Siberian merchant, Sibiriakoff. Who knows what might not be found in these rolling scrub-covered hills which represent the northern extremities of the Ural Mountains?

Tobolsk, which is mentioned above, is quite a considerable town and one of great antiquity, but, being far from a railway, it has not kept ahead of the times, and to-day its streets are grass-grown, there is little or no business, and it has long since lost its prestige as being one of the chief stations on the great Siberian post-road along which so many prisoners have tramped their weary way. It sheltered one exile, however, who, if he can see

RIVER KAMA. AT A RIVER "HALT."



RIVER IRTISH. A COSSACK LANDING-PLACE.

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from the other side of the veil the events of the present time, must derive considerable satisfaction, tinged only with a regret that his words of warning received no fairer a welcome.

Krijanitch was no mean prophet. By birth he was a Serbian, by faith a Roman Catholic and by profession a priest. He was sent to Russia direct from Rome by the Congregation of Rites, and his position was presumably something in the nature of a missionary charged with the thankless task of proving to the Orthodox that in Rome lay salvation. But, as a matter of fact, it seems that he kept his position in religion a profound secret. As a Serb he found himself in deepest sympathy with his brother Slavs. A residence of some years in Moscow showed to him clearly the national mistakes which were being made, and, as one who had travelled much, and had thus gained a broad perspective of affairs in contradistinction to those of the Czar's advisers, who were both patriarchal and provincial, he attempted to awake the sensibilities of the nation.

His main idea was to compile a history of Slavdom, by which method he hoped to be able to undermine the ever-growing German domination. His appeal was to all the nations with Slav blood in their veins; he urged their co-operation towards a common end, the recognition of Slavdom as an influence for civilisation and progress along lines peculiarly pertaining to the Slav character. His words fell upon deaf ears. It seems doubtful which were his precise writings which were responsible for his punishment. Some writers aver that he attacked the Orthodox Church but, be that as it may, in 1660 this originator of Pan-

Slavism left Moscow and made his way to Tobolsk, where he remained for fifteen years in exile. In 1675 the Czar Fedor Alexeivitch gave him back his freedom, invited him to Moscow, and did what lay in his power to make up for those weary years of banishment. But Krijanitch felt the call of his own home and in 1677 returned to his beloved Serbia.

I cannot refrain from quoting the following passage from his writings as given by Professor Kluchevsky. The words might well be written in letters of gold upon the Duma building in Petrograd.

"No people under the sun," he wrote, "hath ever been so shamed and wronged by the foreigner as have we Slavs by the Germans. Nay, we are still stifled beneath a multitude of aliens; they do fool us and lead us by the nose, they do sit upon our backs and ride us like cattle. They do call us swine and dogs, while thinking themselves equal to gods and ourselves but simpletons. Upon that which is wrung of our tears and sweat and of the forced fasting of the Russian people do these foreigners and German merchants grow fat. And all this hath arisen of our fondness of the stranger. At everything which is strange we do marvel and do praise and extol it while despising everything in our life that is our own." Thus does history repeat itself, and never were truer words written.

The German domination of Russia was just as complete in the spring of the year 1914 as in the spring of the year 1660, more than two and a half centuries ago. And it is for this very reason that the present war is fraught with such stupendous consequences for the empire of Russia. It spells

the remodelling of the whole of the interior economic system, and it promises the dawn of a to-morrow, when the sounds of strife shall have ceased, which shall usher in a new Russia, a land of possibility, the foe of militarism and false culture and, above all, the friend of humanity.

Before concluding, there is one point about which I must make mention. In previous pages I have attempted to show that the conditions prevailing amongst the moujiks of the north are by no means so bad as popularly represented and usually believed in England. Everything in this world is a matter of comparison, and the South Sea Islander would neither understand nor appreciate the so-called benefits of a model workman's dwelling in a garden suburb. And further, if it comes to the ownership of such material as is of value for the purpose of barter, be it coin of the realm, cattle or cowrie shells, each valuation must be made according to the neighbourhood in which the owner is situated and the practical use which he can make of his possessions. Thus, probably, in the region of Tiumen a peasant would prefer a certain number of cattle to hard cash. The novelties of our later civilisation possess no attraction for him. He does not want an automatic piano or a camera, he almost certainly has never been to a theatre or even a café chantant, and the very height of enjoyment, so far as his experience goes, and leaving out of the question the vodka shop, is the gramophone, of which hundreds of thousands are to be found in modern Siberia. What he does want, however, and understands and appreciates, is land.

In certain portions of European Russia, particularly in the south-east, the land-hunger became the

most serious problem with which the administration had to deal. After the liberation of the Serfs in 1860 the mistake was made of allotting the land in ample sufficiency upon the figures of the then existing census. No allowance was made for the remarkable prolificness which promptly ensued, and which practically doubled the population of the empire within half a century. It was then that Siberia was thought of as a field for colonisation, and to take away any possible stigma of settling in a country supposed to be peopled by convicts, it was wisely decided that, with the exception of political exiles, no prisoners of the criminal type should be sent there. These latter, that is to say those of the very worst and most desperate character, are sent to the island of Saghalien.

By the last redistribution of land I was told that each family in the district under review receives on an average seven and a half dessiatines (about eighteen and a half acres), which makes of the head of the family a potential landlord. And now that vodka is no more, a startling development has occurred in the amount of the deposits placed in peasants' savings banks. M. Bark, the Russian Minister for Finance, proved that from the date of the prohibition of the sale of vodka to the beginning of 1915,—a space of only four months,—the deposits in these banks exceeded the grand total of the preceding year many times over.

That fact alone is a sufficient augury for the future, the shadow heralding the approach of a great new Russia.

CHAPTER XIII

BRITISH OPPORTUNITIES IN SIBERIA

NOWHERE in the entire world is the outward and visible sign of Germany's commercial supremacy so painfully apparent as in Siberia or, for that matter, throughout Russia in its entirety. The explanation of this may no doubt in part be traced to geographical contiguity. But on the other hand no impartial observer will deny that Teuton perseverance has had no mean influence upon the final result and that, in addition, with the same thoroughness that characterises their military organisation, the commercial campaign in this part of the world has equally been the subject of close attention and careful study. Statisticians, economists, bankers, the heads of great commercial houses, travellers of trained observation, and even professors attached to colleges or universities in Russia have already lent their aid to this vast undertaking, and have most successfully enmeshed the Russian colossus in the net of their own commercialism.

There has been nothing haphazard about the operation; every move has been carefully thought out, every influence favourable to the enterprise used to the utmost, and, considering the history of the past, this domination is scarcely surprising. In the last chapter I mentioned Krijanitch and his revolt against this Teuton mentorship, which irri-

tated him vastly and led him to appeal to the initiative of his fellow-Slavs, whereby it might be finished once and for all. Two and a half centuries have passed since then, and the easy-going Russians have allowed matters to run along in the old groove without having done more than make sporadic attempts for their release. But, equally, it must be admitted that Great Britain has hitherto evinced a very feeble interest in the commercial possibilities of Russia and Siberia. Her attitude has been the absolute antithesis of the German. Such attempts as have been made to produce a closer commercial understanding between the two countries have been disjointed, haphazard and altogether lacking in the careful survey of the situation, which is one of the *sine quâ nons* of success.

At the present moment, however, Europe is being remapped and a whole cargo of preconceived notions, ideas and prejudices are being jettisoned.

It is a commonplace that though the battle-field may clinch the final arguments between nations, there are auxiliary methods by which the supremacy of a great power can be undermined until it shall stand upon a foundation of sand. And the greatest of these methods is a ruthless war upon commerce. Hence, the awakening of an interest in commercial Russia by British merchants may take a higher plane than the avowed object solely of benefiting their own pockets and enlarging their bank balances. They will literally be proving their patriotism; deprive Germany of her trade with Russia—the Russian quota bulks enormously in her annual returns—deprive her for ever of this financial resource and she will be correspondingly

crippled. Certainly, without a doubt, never has ground been better prepared for such a campaign, never has opportunity been greater, and this at a moment when fresh markets of promise are becoming increasingly rare.

Those who have struggled through the preceding pages will probably have realised that one of the strongest underlying features of the Russian character is sentiment. This quality colours the whole of the Russian's attitude both towards the individual and towards his daily round of life. Emphatically that is not the hall-mark of the true business man with whom sentiment is altogether a negligible quantity! But then the Russian is not a business man born, and when, from necessity, he is pitchforked into a position where the most acute commercial acumen is requisite, he is, as often as not, a square peg in a round hole. How could it be well otherwise if he be swayed by sentiment?

But, equally, such a characteristic can be turned to valuable account when it is employed in a direction promising mutual profit to those immediately concerned. If, and this I know to be a fact, a Russian would rather pay a higher price and buy English goods in preference to German, not necessarily because he thinks they are better, but because his impulse is to support those he likes against those he dislikes, then surely this feature may be accepted as affording the most happy of auguries for the closer commercial relationship and understanding between the two countries. Long before the present war it was easy to find evidence of this trend of feeling. No matter how much Russia, as a race, was vilified and misunderstood,

it was a curious fact that to the Russian this attitude in no way changed his personal feelings towards the Britisher, and that he dismissed with a "Nichevo" what privately might well have caused him pain and left him with a rankling sense of injustice.

Straws often show how the wind blows, and I remember as long ago as 1909, after crossing into Germany at Eydkuhnen, the frontier of the Berlin-Petrograd line, as the Germans streamed into the carriage the sole Russian occupant transferred his hand luggage to my side of the compartment. Probably I looked surprised, for he at once volunteered the statement, "I don't like those people. I know you're English; I hope you won't mind my sitting by you."

Now with such a foundation upon which to work it seems tolerably reasonable to suppose that if crucial mistakes are avoided, the best of results must *ipso facto* accrue. Hence I may perhaps point out with advantage certain cardinal errors which British merchants have hitherto committed. There is nothing new or sensational in them; they have formed the pith of every Blue Book and Consular report for years past. But either these reports are ignored as being too dull from which to profit, or else the conservatism of the merchant has degenerated into something like pigheadedness. Firstly, then, nearly always the following sentence figures prominently in one form or another.

"Merchants can expect to derive no benefit from circulars written in English and giving only English measurements, weights and prices."

Yet ninety per cent of the catalogues which reach our Consuls in Russia are framed in this

SIBERIAN PEASANT GIRLS.

Note that boots are at a discount.

To face p. 240.

modating style, and are thus of the same value as waste paper.

Reverse the proceeding. Where is the Russian exporter who, anxious to open up a business connection in England, would send out his trade circulars in Russian and calculated in roubles and poods? He would argue, "If the thing is worth doing at all, then I must dress my window. I must make my catalogues intelligible and attractive if I am to reap any advantage from my initial expense; that is a matter of common-sense, and I have no intention of spoiling my ship for a ha'porth of paint." Few people will be found to quarrel with this man's deduction. In fact, were this hypothetical case submitted to a British merchant, his summing up would be, "Well, the man would be a fool if he did not take that rudimentary bit of trouble." And the amazing part is that that same English business man is precisely the sinner whose circulars litter the floor and encumber the waste-paper baskets of British Consulates in Russia.

Secondly, hitherto the appointment of agents in various centres has been conducted, bye and large, upon no regular basis, thus involving British manufacturers in considerable losses. In nine cases out of ten the fault has been their own.

Two incidents which chanced to come to my personal knowledge in Warsaw!!

The first was that of a big Sheffield firm of machine-tool makers. They supplied their agent, who came with a recommendation from a bank, with two thousand pounds' worth of stock. Unable after six months to get any satisfaction, any accounts or any money, they despatched a representative from England to look into the matter. The agent was not at his

address, which consisted of one room, but had packed up his belongings, had realised the firm's effects, and was taking a " rest-cure " at Carlsbad. The sum of thirty shillings was the net amount of the money received by the parent firm. Incidentally, in this case the absconding agent was a Polish Jew, and the so-called bank given by way of a reference was of microscopic dimensions and owned by a co-religionist. Curiously enough, this latter semi-bogus concern also closed its doors shortly afterwards. Hence the greatest caution should be adopted in appointing agents both in Russia and in Siberia, and the references given should in every case, if possible, be verified by British Consuls.

The other incident was that of a well-known firm of typewriter makers. I happened to use one of their machines and asked them for the name of their agent in Warsaw, which was duly supplied to me. I went to the address given, only to find that no one had ever heard of the name. I then tried the police, and was told that the gentleman in question was an undesirable customer who had left the town none too soon. This again displays carelessness and a lack of realisation of the importance of the issues at stake.

Thirdly comes the great bogey of the Russian language. Anent this vexed question I hazard the opinion that, after this war, German, which has hitherto been the commercial medium throughout the length and breadth of Russia, will cease so to be. That it was ever adopted was certainly force of circumstance rather than admiration for that extremely ugly guttural tongue. It was one of the penalties paid by geographical contiguity, like the presence of the ubiquitous German *commis*

voyageur. In effect, there is really no reason why the Russians should not carry on their business in their own language or, failing that, in English. But first of all the bubble should be burst that to learn Russian is on a par with learning Chinese, and that for the average person life is too short to master it. This is as much a myth as that that the sun never shines in Siberia. Catch the young idea, and with concentration and an efficient teacher Russian is not much more difficult and far more interesting than German, and a year or two's tuition should make a good scholar. Neither is its accomplishment by any means an impossibility in later life. To be of practical value it is not necessary to have a control over it such as some Russians have over English, that is to say, they speak without appreciable accent, their vocabulary is a wide one, and their grammar to all intents and purposes perfect.

But for commercial purposes a deal can be accomplished in a twelvemonth. For example, those anxious to qualify as Russian interpreters in the Army or Navy are seconded for one year for study in the country itself. When they arrive they know little more than the alphabet and a few rudimentary phrases. After the year, if they pass their examination, they should have a thoroughly practical knowledge of the language, an easy colloquial style, and should read, write and translate with facility. They may not be accomplished scholars of a professorial type, but at this time of day that is no great loss and in their profession would help them not a whit the more. The same applies perhaps with even greater force to the merchant or the commercial traveller.

In the town of Omsk I had a most interesting conversation with the English manager of a great American undertaking upon this very point. "But," I said, "when you first came out here, surely it must have been fearfully difficult for you, or did you already speak the language?" "No," was his reply, "I could scarcely speak at all." "But you tell me you were travelling for your firm—you must have had some vocabulary?" "Well," he answered, "as I say, I was able to talk only a sort of pidgin-Russian and that is a fact." "That must have hindered you," I said. He looked at me in a quizzical way and replied, "As a matter of fact, it didn't hinder me at all—it rather helped me. You see, people spotted that I was a foreigner, upon which I would hastily tell them I was English. That was quite enough to interest them. I was immediately asked a number of questions and it was wonderful how quickly we established a friendly basis with the aid of my grammatical mistakes, which amused them, coupled with a sense of humour on my part, which enabled me to laugh. Not being a business man, you have probably no idea how that sort of friendly familiarity helps us travellers. Why, I reckon I was one of the most successful salesman along my own line in Siberia."

My informant then told me that it was not until he had been three years in the country that he seriously took up the study of the language, which he now speaks with the greatest of ease and fluency. And it must be remembered that here again was a man who accomplished this long after he had grown up. This is no fiction; it is the plain story of a plain man, every detail of which can most easily be verified. To spare the blushes of the

gentleman in question I have suppressed his name and certain other details. At the same time, however, it may be of interest to relate that he started life as an office boy in Farringdon Street and that now, at the age of about thirty-four, he is drawing a salary of approximately £1000 a year. He had no educational advantages, he had no influence, and even his health was none too good; but, as fortune would have it, he was swept into the *milieu* of Russian commercialism, and is a standing example to others of what the Slav Empire offers to those who are shrewd enough and enterprising enough to leave the beaten track.

Fourthly, in connection with British enterprise in Siberia comes the question of studying the market. This is Germany's *tour de force;* nothing is so insignificant as not to merit attention, from the shape of a button to the ornamentation upon an earthenware bowl. And it is precisely in this department that the British hitherto have failed. Whether as a result of inherent conservatism or whether indicative of sheer carelessness, it is unnecessary to argue. But the fact remains that till now the general attitude of the merchant in this country towards his prospective purchasers has been, "These are the goods I have to sell. If you don't like them you can go elsewhere. I really don't see why I should consult your wishes when I have customers who are quite satisfied with what I have been making for the last fifty years. My great-grandfather founded the firm, and these same goods were sold even in those days. That ought to be a sufficient recommendation for them."

Allowing for some slight exaggeration, such is the position of affairs, and it will be allowed that

it is not an encouraging one for a purchaser who knows what he wants and exactly why he wants it.

That is precisely where the Germans excel. With a fine sense of business acumen they scooped the pool. So long as they could sell their stuff, it mattered not to them, in the least, how it was fashioned if they could see their way to a certain profit. I was told of a case concerning a firm of British agricultural-machine makers who wished to open up a connection in Siberia. They were specialists in plough-making and, since the horses in Siberia are small, it was thought that the plough sent by this firm to East Africa would be eminently suitable, only it was painted battleship grey. The prospective agent pointed this out, impressed upon the directors of the concern that the Siberian peasantry had a great affection for bright colours, as evidenced even in the petticoats and homespun of their women-folk. Could not these ploughs be made to look attractive to possible purchasers and be painted crimson and finished with blue and yellow, or something of that nature ? The directors to a man refused, they would as soon have committed treason as have turned out their wares looking as if they had come from a sixpenny bazaar.

This is not the spirit in which to approach the capture of a new market. There is no lack of complaints from firms who think that they are not sufficiently supported by Governmental aid, and who expect Consuls to possess the wisdom of Solomon, the patience of Job and the power of the archangel Michael. Yet when it comes to helping themselves at the expense of a trifling loss of fancied dignity, they immediately resent it and write their absolute veto across the proposal. Most

distinctly is that not good business, and most distinctly will it not work in that Siberia which after the war will, I am confident, go ahead with all the rapidity of the New World.

Turning now more particularly to the species of goods which may be expected to find a ready sale; as a preface, it may be well to explain the *raison d'être* of the shortage in Russia of manufactured articles of every kind. I have already previously attempted to show that the Russian is a natural agriculturist. It is bred in the bone, and though he may be slow at learning new methods, he will produce a crop off a piece of land where many farmers of more scientific attainments would fail. But he does not take kindly to machinery or processes necessary for manufacture. Apart altogether from the industrial unrest which habitually seems to surround him, he is a slow worker and an uninterested one at that. A capable Russian foreman is about as rare as the great auk's egg, which accounts for the tremendous number of Englishmen who find their way to Russia from mills in Yorkshire and Lancashire to take up positions as foremen. And similarly in the higher flights, managers and superintendents, these are very rarely Russian.

The Russian proper lacks that commercial initiative which is the keystone of such undertakings, but which, incidentally, is found strongly developed in the Pole. This explains the rapid rise of the Polish cotton industry and the creation of a town like Lodz, which has sprung up mushroom-fashion in the last few years, becoming the Manchester of Poland. It is interesting to follow this particular point a little further. It has always been the desire of the Russian Government to be independent of

foreign assistance as regards the supply of raw cotton. Experiments were undertaken and a start made in Central Asia. The result has been most gratifying, and there is every reason to suppose that, in time, enough raw cotton to supply the Polish mills will be home-grown. And that, it will be noticed, is not far removed from farming and is directly connected with the science of agriculture ! !

Desperate efforts have been made to turn at least a portion of the Russian race into manufacturers. Encouragement of the most perfervid kind has been offered, and a protective tariff has been built up which is simply crushing in its weight, and yet, marvellous to say, it has had little effect upon the sale of foreign articles. It quite failed in the direction in which it was intended, and has merely made of Russia a most expensive country in which to live. Along some lines manufacturers from abroad have found it convenient to dodge the question, and have started factories in Russia, such, for instance, as the Singers of sewing-machine fame. The vast majority of these undertakings, however, have hitherto been German, and it seems highly probable that the boycott of their trade which is likely to continue will bankrupt them, leaving another open field for others. Thus it will be seen that, broadly speaking, the market is illimitable and that practically any article finds a chance of sale.

To give some notion of Germany's control of Russia's import trade hitherto, I take the following figures from the *Russian Year Book*, 1914.

In the year 1911, of the percentage of the imported textiles, raw and manufactured, England supplied 14·6 per cent, Germany 38·2 per cent.

That is the most favourable figure given.

CAMELS AT SEMIPALATINSK.

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Of ceramics and pottery Germany supplied 61·6 per cent against England's 11 per cent. Of chemicals Germany's figure is 61·1 per cent, against England's 9·8 per cent, while—and this is an astounding figure—of clothing, buttons, beads, haberdashery and stationery Germany supplied 78·7 per cent, against a miserable 2 per cent from England. Finally of ores, metals and machinery the figures were 62·4 per cent Germany, and 16·2 per cent England. From the same source I take the following table, a detailed statement of the manufactured metals for 1912. The English figures are given first.

Machinery, except agricultural, 15 per cent, against 82 per cent.

Scientific apparatus, 2 per cent, against 88 per cent.

Sheet-iron goods, 3·3 per cent, against 84·4 per cent.

Wire, 25 per cent, against 64·2 per cent.

Wire manufactured, 9·8 per cent, against 79·3 per cent.

Iron and steel goods, 10 per cent, against 77·7 per cent.

The value of the total imports from Great Britain during that year amounted to 139,300,000 roubles; those from Germany valued 519,100,000 roubles. These figures speak for themselves and give some idea of the field there is to capture, some idea only, because notice has not been taken of the results of the German manufacturers working actually within the empire.

This extraordinary German control of the market is a feature which the traveller cannot avoid and which strikes him the more the longer he witnesses it. Take [redacted] of a simple necessity like a

bandage. Prior to the war these were always German and, be it added, those of the standard type were ridiculously bad. Medicines, drugs, surgical instruments, clinical thermometers, medicated waters, virtually, one might almost say, the whole stock-in-trade of a chemist's shop were 99 per cent German. And six weeks after the outbreak of hostilities, I can bear witness myself that there was already a shortage in many of the most usual and useful remedies. It goes without saying that, to phrase it mildly, this will prove a tremendous inconvenience when a war is being waged and during the winter especially, when goods will have to travel via Vladivostock and across Siberia.

If one goes into a stationer's shop one will buy German blotting-paper, German writing-pads, German pen nibs and German pencils. Tools are mostly of German make. There is German lubricating oil and there are German sanitary appliances. Imagine the case of a man who was suddenly obliged to replenish his wardrobe ; he would probably be forced to wear a ready-made German suit, German boots made to look like American, though in this connection the Poles are becoming increasingly aggressive, having several large factories working in Warsaw, and he would probably sport a German hat.

At the restaurant one is certain to eat with a German knife and fork, and not improbably drink out of a German glass. To add insult to injury, it is quite possible that one may make a meal which will include tinned vegetables of German origin, not to mention fruit from the same source. It is unnecessary, surely, to emphasise the point with any greater degree of clearness. It can be imagined then, what a complete stoppage of all these imports

must mean to the people in Siberia, and it can also be imagined what tremendous gaps there must be to fill from some other source now that the German boycott is a *fait accompli*, and, in a moderated degree, is likely long to continue after the war.

The determination of the Russians not to buy German goods is probably only partially appreciated in England. In Petrograd, at a time when the Kodak Company had sold out all their available stock of films and were unable to obtain more, the German films were drugs in the market, in spite of nearly every officer going to the front being anxious to take a camera. In the very same street wherein the Kodak Company have their premises I saw a German photographer's with a window full of plates and films, but he was not doing a rouble's worth of business a day. At Omsk, the military required some bicycles, and a friend of mine had about forty for sale. The first question he was asked was, "Are these bicycles English? If they are German we can do without." And so it goes on through every department of life.

Again, apart from sentiment, English goods have long been quite the fashion with the wealthy Russian, and that weighs very materially in the scales. It is a peculiarity which has caused comment for centuries that the average Russian is somewhat inclined to under-estimate the value of anything produced in his own country. In that respect he has evidently not altered since the days of Krijanitch. Hating Germany, as he undoubtedly does and did, he was willing enough to buy German goods in preference to his own because, presumably, he had more confidence in their quality. This trait of distrust, in some cases, becomes an obsession

which lacks all sense of proportion. For instance, upon French wines imported into Russia there is literally a crushing duty. But apart from champagne, the demand for which one can understand, vast quantities of burgundy and claret find their way into the empire and are disposed of at ridiculous prices in restaurants and elsewhere. Now Russia herself produces in the Crimea, Bessarabia and the Caucasus excellent wines fully as good as the French, or certainly as good as those cheaper vintages for which there is an easy sale. But the Russians ignore them; far rather would they pay more and get something inferior merely because it has a magic label showing that it came from France. This little weakness is very human, and one can afford to laugh at it. At the same time it possesses a decided value, since it shows that, in the general market, foreign goods are liked because they are foreign, and if to that is added the word "English," then to use vulgar language, they should sell like hot cakes.

Another stumbling-block, I have been told, to British trade in Russia and Siberia is the fact that hitherto the merchant or manufacturer has been unwilling to extend credit. In this direction he has been unbending and unaccommodating, demanding always cash against documents. It need hardly be mentioned that both the Germans and the Americans have been more complacent and have benefited accordingly. In the first place Siberia is only a country in process of development and, even as such, her immense wealth has merely been scratched. In communities like these, that is to say agricultural communities, most financial operations are governed by the harvest. That is

the time when money is most plentiful, and when, so to speak, the country prepares for its next year's campaign. Between-times money is expected to be scarce, and consequently payments will be delayed. It would be next door to impossible for the community to carry along on an absolutely cash basis. Its development would be hopelessly retarded, in fact, it would lack the means necessary to ensure that development.

Hence, when the Siberian purchaser, or rather the middleman on the spot, asks for credit, provided he is a reputable trader, it is because he is well aware that he must wait till after the harvest before he will be able to get his money. I am speaking now of machinery of various kinds, agricultural and otherwise, though with lesser force it may be taken to apply to the whole field of commercial operation. And in this connection there is one other point regarding heavy goods, namely, that the merchant situated far away in Siberia is compelled to wait probably several months before his orders from England reach him. Siberia is a vast country, and there is only the one main line of railway which in itself bespeaks probable delay.

Yet British merchants would seem to expect to be able to pocket their money even before the goods are received. But happily these difficulties are not impossible of adjustment, and by studying the ground in an unprejudiced fashion they can assuredly be overcome. My advice to those to whom it is possible is "Go and see. Travel to Siberia, and a few weeks' inspection will probably have a convincing effect upon future policy."

For there is no possible doubt that Siberia is as

much a country in the making as is Canada, with which it has many points in common. And, like Canada, it is every year receiving its quota of immigrants who are, little by little, pushing their way further and further into the immensity of its plains and forests. The Russian Government is keenly aware of the importance of this annual colonisation and takes not only the greatest care in the choice of these settlers, but as long ago as 1908 sent Prince Lvoff to Canada, there to study the question of immigration and settlement first-hand. At Montreal I had the pleasure of meeting that gentleman. In answer to my query whether the emigration to Siberia was being carried out haphazard, and whether certain newspaper reports, I had seen, were accurate which asserted that thousands of would-be colonists were returning to European Russia, disappointed and penniless, he gave me as answer, "It is quite to the contrary. I have seen what is being done for the settlers here. If anything, in Siberia my Government dry-nurses them too much. I am afraid thereby they may lose their initiative."

From personal observation, and from what I was told by those upon the spot who ought to know, there was no exaggeration in the Prince's statement. The Siberian immigrant is working along progressive lines, his motto might well be, "Advance," and for those who cavil and sneer there is the outward and visible sign of his handiwork to be seen to-day. A huge country is opening up by leaps and bounds. Even in its remoter portion, as well as sprinkled along its main highway, are great towns, which for hustling progress and mushroom growth bear reasonable comparison with anything

to be found in Canada, and in certain respects are more remarkable, since there are centres, hundreds of miles from a railway, which contain populations numbering thousands.

This is the market which the British merchant can capture if he will. At moments one becomes discouraged with Anglo-Saxon apathy. At the Kief exhibition in 1913, with the exception of one or two agricultural-machine companies which had pavilions, England was represented solely by a firm of perfume manufacturers, and even they turned out to be bogus. The presence of an English saleswoman lent an air of reality to the proceedings, but the real owner was discovered to be a Polish Jew who was working upon a stolen passport.

That was England's representation ! !

It certainly possesses its humorous side, but when one saw the German exhibits and the evident care and forethought which had been expended upon their display, one could not help feeling somewhat depressed about one's own country. It is a peculiar fact that though there are dozens of writers, with greater experience and greater capabilities than I possess, who have pointed out the commercial possibilities of Russia, the average opinion among business men, as a class, still appears to be that beads will do for barter in Siberia. The actual fact is that, unless a distinct move forward is made over ground already prepared, as I have proved, Siberia will become Americanised, due solely to the enterprise of that nation.

Finally, there is a suggestion which it seems to me contains an idea of much value. On all sides it is allowed that great changes are taking place, new ideas giving way to old. In view of this fact and of

the undoubted awakening of Russia as to the value of her resources, and of Great Britain as to the character of the ally for whom she now has, and will in the future, I hope, continue to have a sincere friendship, surely the teaching of the Russian language might take a place in the curriculum of our larger schools, in addition to, if not in place of, German. At present learning Russian in England is rather a costly matter and by no means easy. There is an excellent school of Russian studies at Liverpool University, but it is the only one of its precise character in the country. Besides, it is not convenient for everyone to go to Liverpool, or even to attend an university elsewhere.

For the rest, the ordinary teachers advertised in the daily press are generally inferior, and Russians only in name. What is required is a broader, more general and further reaching movement. No one can entertain the shadow of a doubt that Slavdom has a future comparable in every way, as far as its benefits to humanity are concerned, with Teutonism at its best, and before it became maddened with lust for blood and conquest.

The easiest method of fostering a lasting friendship between Great Britain and her ally is by breaking down the walls of distrust and prejudice, the legacy of too many years of ignorance and misunderstanding. Introduce the Russian language to the youth of the country, offer them just those rudiments of Russian history which will familiarise them with the commonest historical events in its career, and a great step forward will have been made towards exploding those mischievous fallacies which conjure up visions of latent antagonism and

possible causes of jealousy between the two countries. The world is big enough for Anglo-Saxon and Slav, and if common-sense, let alone the most primal of business instinct, be allowed full play, each will prove the complement of the other, and will work towards a harmonious co-operation which shall ensure the wondrous benefit of a lasting peace to the entire world.

CHAPTER XIV

OMSK AND COSSACK TERRITORY IN WAR-TIME

AT Omsk we heard our first rumours of war. They were shadowy, however, merely suggestions that there might be trouble between Servia and Austria, in which case it was taken as a matter of course that Russia would be involved. For the rest, the life of the town was absolutely normal, business was being conducted as usual, and at the steamboat office we found that the steamers were running according to schedule to Semipalatinsk and Zaisan, the latter our objective not far from the Chinese frontier. In order to catch one of the best boats of the river flotilla we were obliged to wait for two or three days, which we employed in wandering around this great Siberian centre which might well be christened "The Winnipeg of Siberia." In 1907 I had last visited it and nothing could have been more striking than the way in which the place had shot ahead. In that year the hotels were horrible and, with the single exception of the Opera-house, there was scarcely a stone building to be seen, always excluding the cathedral, which in the majority of cases seems to be built before there is any congregation. But all that is changed.

To-day, Omsk is a fine city with substantial buildings, public gardens and th

OMSK. THE BRIDGE AND GOVERNOR'S PALACE.

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throbs with an intense business activity. There is a bridge over a little creek connecting two portions of the town. It is in the main thoroughfare, and anyone doubtful as to Omsk's commercial awakening need only stand at one end of that bridge and watch. There is a policeman regulating the traffic quite *à l'anglais*, and from sunrise to sunset there is a constant and steady stream of vans, carts and carriages reminding one of the City of London at noon. It is wonderful, this never-ending procession, and makes one realise, as probably nothing else could, what Siberia portends in the future.

The Opera-house is a fine building, if not a beautiful one, with a handsome foyer and an interior plainly but tastefully decorated. The seating accommodation is absolutely on a par with anything to be found in London. *Pagliacci*, that old favourite which one has heard scores of times in different settings, chanced to be given by an Italian company while we were there. We attended the performance which was remarkable for the excellence of both the tenor and baritone: a rapturous ovation from a crowded house hailed the fall of the curtain and it was clear that the audience keenly appreciated the treat. The incident would not be worth relating, did it not serve to show and to emphasise the point that Siberian advance is along every line, not least of all artistically and educationally. For Omsk incidentally possesses also the largest technical and engineering college in Siberia. This is a huge building which can accommodate about 750 students and its graduates are amongst the leaders of their profession in the Russian Empire.

Time was when the bazaar or market, a vast medley of booths and stalls, was positively dangerous after sundown. I remember being seriously warned against it, and being told further never to allow an isvostchik to drive me down any of the side streets leading out therefrom. But things have altered, and to-day one can drive whereso'er one will in the utmost safety. On moonlight nights for some strange reason street lamps are unlit, the moon presumably being expected to act in their stead. But on such nights there are dark corners, sinister alleys, and all the appurtenances which favour the thief and the footpad. Hence it says something for modern Omsk when I write that at all hours of the night have my wife and I left friends' houses and made our way to our hotel—ever unmolested. This, by the way, even after war was declared and the town had donned a semi-military mantle. But then Omsk is a city of surprise. Somehow one does not connect Siberia with flowers and fruit. The shortest of springs and the swift advent of a torrid summer may produce size in the latter, usually accompanied, however, with an entire absence of flavour. Yet in a friend's garden we regaled ourselves upon the most luscious and largest raspberries we had ever eaten. Moreover, the garden ran riot with a delicious profusion of old English flowers, Canterbury bells, stocks, wall-flowers and the like. In answer to our question as to whether they needed much tending our host remarked, "Oh, dear me no, my wife just dropped the seeds about and they've come up at their own sweet will."

Omsk, of course, lives chiefly upon its dairy produce. A thousand tons of butter sounds almost

fanciful, so accustomed is the average mind to thinking of that commodity in pounds and half-pounds. Hence ten thousand tons of butter beggars the imagination, yet annually leaves Omsk for export an amount far in excess of that figure. And eggs also, and grain. The butter eventually finds its way to England—that is to say, the major portion of it—and is as often as not retailed as Danish, since as a precautionary measure it crosses that country and in so doing absorbs a fresh country of origin. Not that there is any real need to conceal the place of its birth, only prejudices die hard and as yet the name of Siberian butter is somewhat against its easy sale. So much for Omsk in peace; a bustling, throbbing centre of untiring never-sleeping enterprise: a wearing place for the ordinary visitor who is seeking for quiet, peace and relaxation.

On the day of our departure for Zaisan the sky had darkened from an international standpoint and certain ominous signs gave us premonition of the coming storm. A gentleman, manager of a great mining concern situated on the upper Irtish, told us with a long face that the banks were declining credit and had been instructed to refuse the payment of foreign drafts. It was also stated in the papers that there was a rumour of an Austro-Serbian rupture, but still no one really believed that the horrors of war were to be let loose and the general attitude was, "Oh, some way will be found around the difficulty."

Hence we departed upon our long up-river trip without worrying too much over the possibilities of the future. For it was hard to contemplate the darker side of life with things as they were. Through the kindness of a friend we had been

specially introduced to the captain of our steamer, the *Europa*, and had been given the best cabin on the boat, a large, airy one with a table, running water, electric light and excellent window-shades. In addition, the weather was glorious, not uncomfortably hot, and in the evening, on the top deck whereon was situated the wheel-house, we would sit in deck chairs and survey the mysterious green steppe, the horizon of which seemed bounded by infinity. Further, we were lucky in our passengers, a particularly charming couple being an officer and his wife who were having what they called "a second honeymoon." They, likewise, were bound for Zaisan, and we all looked forward with pleasurable anticipation to our trip.

Owing to the great distances traversed by these steamers there is a dispensary and a feldscher on board. In our case the latter was a jolly, little, fat, dark-haired Jewess, whose constant smile and cheery geniality put everyone in a good temper. Primarily, she told us, she was there to look after the crew and the prisoners; these boats also always boast of a sort of prison cell wherein can be confined twenty or thirty offenders. We saw them. Under the charge of two soldiers, behind a barrier of wire-netting, lounged some fifteen of these nominal desperadoes. They did not look very terrifying and were shyly grateful for such gifts as a pinch of tea or a couple of cigarettes. One could not help thinking that if there had been one or two Anglo-Saxon hooligans in the crowd, they would have had the wire-fencing down in no time and would have given the soldiers an unpleasant five minutes, especially as I was

told the latter had no cartridges for their rifles. But perhaps the prisoners did not know that ! !

The whole of the right bank of the Irtish between Omsk and Semipalatinsk belongs to the Cossacks of this region, and twenty years ago, except for them, the whole country on both sides of the river was deserted and given over to the wandering hordes of Khirgiz, a nomadic tribe possessing no civil rights and who subsist upon horse-breeding and cattle. Some of these Khirgiz are reputed to be very wealthy; they are strange-looking people with a distinctly Chinese cast of countenance and they are marvellous horsemen. One sees their urtas dotted along the bank of the river, queer-looking, beehive-shaped huts made of mud and wattle in which they live during the winter. In the summer they live an open-air life on the steppe and are notable for their hospitality to strangers.

Of the Cossacks, about whom so much is talked nowadays, the following data may possess some interest. The Cossacks originated in the middle of the 16th century and their name primarily signified vagabond. At that time Russia was suffering greatly from Tartar raids and these free-lances, many of whom were of Polish extraction, banded together nominally for the defence of the frontier, but actually for their own ends. They embraced all nationalities and in their ranks might be found, not only the genus rolling-stone, but also a goodly proportion of those who had fled from justice. Anyone might join them since no questions were asked, and so long as the new-comer could ride and shoot he was a welcome addition to this band of roving spirits.

Such was, in brief, their origin. As they increased in numbers and strength they grew to be recognised as an institution, and as forming the nucleus of a most valuable military aid. Acting as they always did on the frontier it was thought that their depredations and incursions into hostile territory would be positively advantageous and that, equally, they would prevent any eruption across their own boundaries, or rather the boundaries of those to whom they owed temporary allegiance. Thus they acted as an excellent frontier force.

As their power increased, however, they were removed from their original location on the banks of the Dnieper and were given territory in the basin of the Don. Time rolled on and sections of them joined expeditions into the then unconquered regions of Siberia and elsewhere, being granted as a reward for their services large tracts of land in perpetuity, usually, be it said, in the remoter regions of the empire to which the regular colonist had not then penetrated. They were permitted to maintain their organisation which, though of a rough-and-ready description, was sufficient for their needs and served to hold them together. The return demanded was that, when called upon, they should always give their services to their Czar protector. The election of their ataman or chief was by popular vote, and to him they owed unquestioning obedience unless it was the general opinion that he had proved unsatisfactory, when again by popular vote he was forced to surrender his rank and become once more an ordinary Cossack.

That the life possessed a considerable charm and that the profits of their brigandage and looting

RIVER IRTISH. PEASANTS HAVING PROCLAMATION OF WAR READ TO THEM.

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must have been satisfactory may be judged from the fact that no effort was ever made to keep any man a Cossack who wished to leave the association and return to the duties and status of a regular citizen. Few ever did so!!

Marriage was not encouraged, and, as a deterrent, the married Cossack was usually prohibited from taking part in their forays and was relegated to work in the fields with the women-folk, which formed a punishment of some magnitude when it is remembered that the booty accruing from any expedition was always equally divided amongst those actually taking part in it, the shirkers getting nothing.

The old saying, "Honour among thieves" had its exemplification amongst them. Human life was held cheap enough when concerned with outsiders, but if a Cossack murdered a Cossack he received short shrift; a pit was dug and the assassin together with the corpse of his victim were interred together. Similarly, robbery was punished with the pillory, the thief having to spend three days at least undergoing this penalty during which time anyone was at liberty to strike him. If the goods had been disposed of and could not be returned or their equivalent in money could not be paid, the criminal had to remain in durance until some friend came forward and helped him. Thus the unpopular man fared badly and usually died from the effects of his frequent beatings. Likewise, those who did not pay their debts suffered in an almost similar manner, and thus a sort of irregular justice was meted out serving really to strengthen the esprit de corps of the body as a whole. After some particularly successful coup they would indulge in tremendous orgies, and

during this time they were no doubt a terror to friend and foe alike.

Since then a great deal of water has gone under the bridge and the Cossack organisation of to-day is one of the strongest supports of Czardom. No one has ever questioned their loyalty, and time has only served to heighten the romance of their formation as well as rather to exaggerate their unconquerable fierceness. Fearless they certainly are, but it is extraordinary that their reputation, not only abroad but even in their own country, should stand so high as it undoubtedly does, for it is no exaggeration to say that the mere mention of the word "Cossack" is sufficient to dissolve a menacing crowd of strikers or to quell anything in the nature of a popular riot.

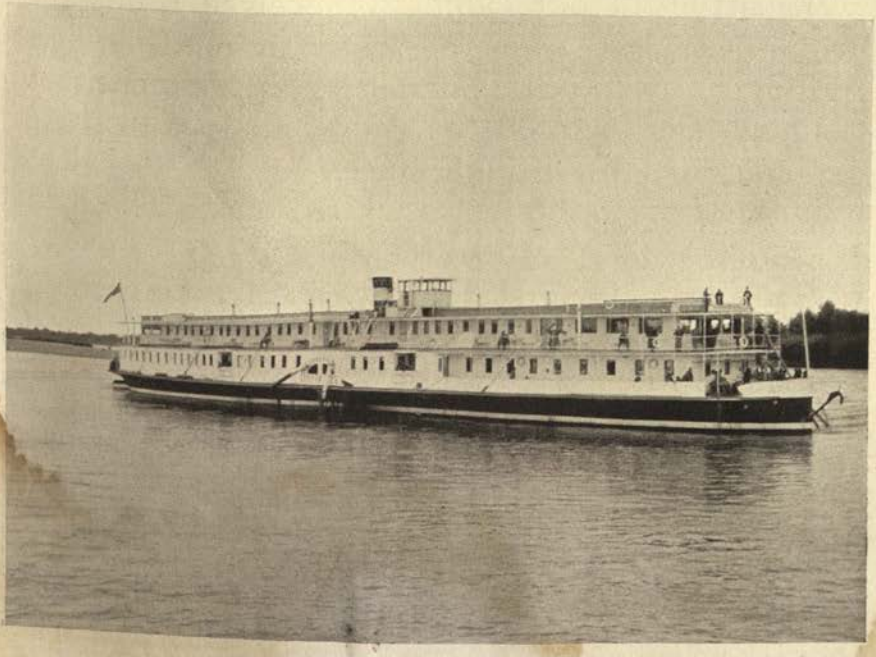
It was on the evening of July 31st that whilst we were sitting in our cabin we received a message from the captain asking us to step up on the bridge. Without a word he pointed to the steppe. A solitary horseman was galloping along with a red pennon fluttering from a lance.

"What's that?" we asked.

"That's war," said the captain briefly.

Such was our first intimation that Russia had crossed the Rubicon and was going once and for all to finish the hated German domination. The Cossack on his stout little pony easily kept abreast of us and his method of operation was clearly visible. He would accost a group of brethren garnering their harvest. There would be some gesticulation, horses would be seized and mounted and within five minutes that portion of the harvest-field, which covers the great Siberian steppe, would be denuded of its manhood. Such action was

RIVER IRTISH.
Note curious formation of cliffs.



THE *IVAN KORNILOFF*, THE LARGEST STEAMER ON THE IRTISH.
Her journey from port to port is farther than from Liverpool to New York.

To face p. 266.

repeated with almost monotonous precision during that long summer evening and it was thanks to this organisation that when we arrived at Semipalatinsk, a steppe town six hundred miles from railhead, we found no less than thirty thousand fully armed and equipped Cossacks and this within four days of the order for the mobilisation.

But another event was to occur while on board which whetted the imaginations of us all and made us wonder what strange movements might be afoot. The following morning we found that we were standing by the largest steamer of the company, in fact the largest steamer on any Siberian river, the *Ivan Korniloff*, which had run aground on a sandbank and was unable to get off. In true Russian style we all scrambled aboard for a gossip and a glass of beer. Seated in the dining-room were three officers, conspicuous on account of their unfamiliar khaki uniform. Curiosity ran high. We made enquiry and elicited the information that they were Chinese from the Altai, bound no one knew whither. Were they on a military mission proceeding to Petrograd, were they members of the Chinese general staff and were they emblematic of an additional enemy whom the German soldiery must sooner or later face? These were the questions left unanswered by the trio of sphinx-like little men who, when they saw the interest they were exciting, retired quietly to their cabins. And to-day those questions still remain unanswered.

On our ship, naturally, excitement ran riot. At Pavlodar our officer friend received orders to return at once to Omsk and needless to say the conversation was of nothing but war, war, war. The feldscher was full of it. Her eyes sparkled with

animation and she was emphatic in her belief that it was the best thing which could have possibly happened for the good of her country. "And," she said, "I shall volunteer, they will be short of doctors and I shall be able to be useful. If I can't do anything else I can at least nurse. Ah, those Germans, how I hate them." This coming from a Jewess showed the German miscalculation in the direction of Russian Jewry. As events proved the Jews came forward in their thousands to serve their country.

On our arrival at Semipalatinsk we found that the prolongation of our journey to Zaisan was impossible. All the steamers running thither had been commandeered for the carriage of troops and so willy-nilly, we had as philosophically as possible to accept our disappointment. We had heard so much of Zaisan; wonderful fruit, luxuriant vegetation, a temperate climate with incessant sunshine, and lastly, excellent hotel accommodation. And not the least remarkable feature in connection with this remote frontier post overlooking the confines of China, one certainly indicative of the way in which Siberia progresses, is that communication between it and its port of Tolopev Muis on Lake Zaisan, a distance of forty versts, is covered by means of an excellent motor-car service. This over a thousand miles from a railway!!

At the best of times Semipalatinsk is not an attractive place, it is flat, dusty and, in the summer, bakingly hot. Like most Siberian towns it begins nowhere and rambles along until it is lost in the steppe; it is unkempt, unshorn and [redacted] a ragamuffin in comparison with i[redacted]

SEMIPALATINSK. THE PRISONERS' GATE WHERE EXILES USED TO BE TALLIED.

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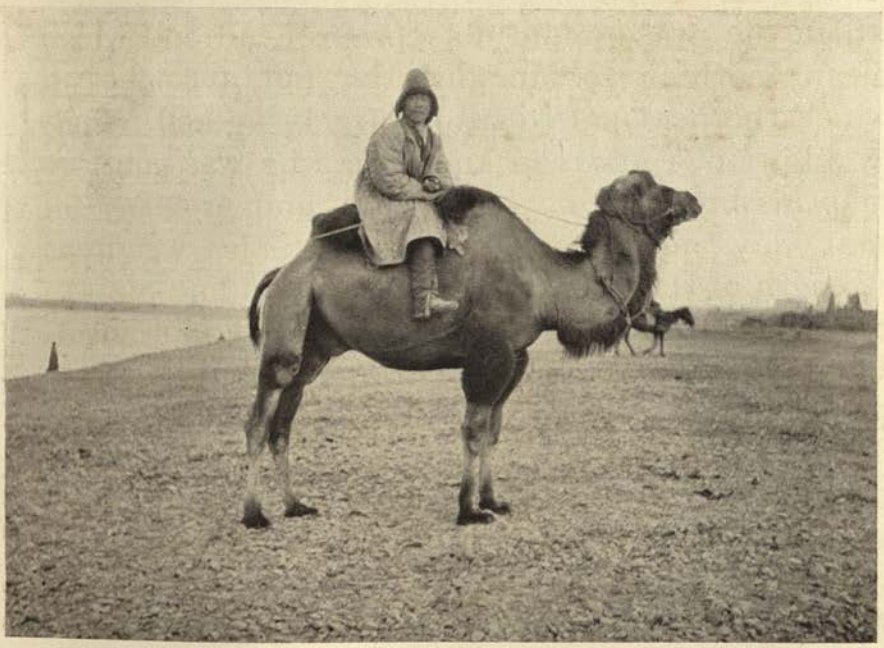
able brothers of Siberia. And during those days of the mobilisation these attributes were multiplied many times, for not only had the Cossacks come in but also many thousands of reservists. Accommodation was overtaxed and business of every kind was at a standstill. For it must be remembered that during the Japanese War—and this is a point which few realise—mobilisation had not affected these remote regions of the empire. Moreover, Japan spelt little or nothing to the Siberian moujik. The enormous distance to the seat of operations coupled with the fact that the Japanese was a rare visitor in the country and for that reason was an unknown quantity, an algebraical X, to these riders of the plains, rendered it difficult for them to realise that their country was at war, and entirely failed to arouse them from their habitual apathy.

But on this occasion things were very different. The German was both known and appreciated at his proper value. The moujik had even made the acquaintance of German commercial travellers. German goods he bought and German methods of business he disliked intensely. He put up with them because there was nothing else to be done and because the merchants of other nations had not been sufficiently enterprising to come his way. But at the back of his mind he knew that now that was all going to be altered. And probably the idea of ridding the Russian Empire of this German tutelage swayed in no small degree the people's sentiment and made the war positively popular.

This was no struggle against an unknown foe anent some obscure international disagreement,

which the peasant did not comprehend and which meant nothing to him directly, but a conflict in which the personal equation largely figured. And, in addition, each man knew that he was going to help his brother Slavs in Serbia, and probably till that day he had never realised the wondrous strength of those ties of sentiment binding Slav to Slav which form the basis of that great movement, Pan-Slavism. That passionate devotion of brother Slav for brother Slav, which was the keynote and indeed embodied the whole creed of that popular national hero General Skobeleff, is not fully understood abroad. There may be sympathy between the great Anglo-Saxon races, but it has never as yet manifested itself so spontaneously, so wholeheartedly, and so determinedly as when the rights and liberties of even the smallest Slav nation have been seriously threatened by the actions of a greater power. The general attitude, which could be almost felt in the air, was one of unmistakable determination which spoke for itself. By nature the Russians are not volatile, and their enthusiasm is not of that positive type which manifests itself in wild outbursts of popular feeling. Rather is it deeper and more spiritual. All those with whom we discussed the situation spoke like men who having weighed the chances are satisfied.

We found that our friends at Omsk had telegraphed news of our pending arrival, and so during our stay we were carefully mothered by two youngsters, one an Englishman, who was engaged to a German girl, and the other a German. Our first meal was rather a funny one, and upon my wife's proposal it was cordially agreed without a dissentient voice that, whilst we were together



A KHIRGIZ AND HIS CAMEL.

SEMIPALATINSK. KHIRGIZ WATCHING MOBILIZATION.
Note their caps of fur, the then temperature being about 95 in the shade.

To face p. 270.

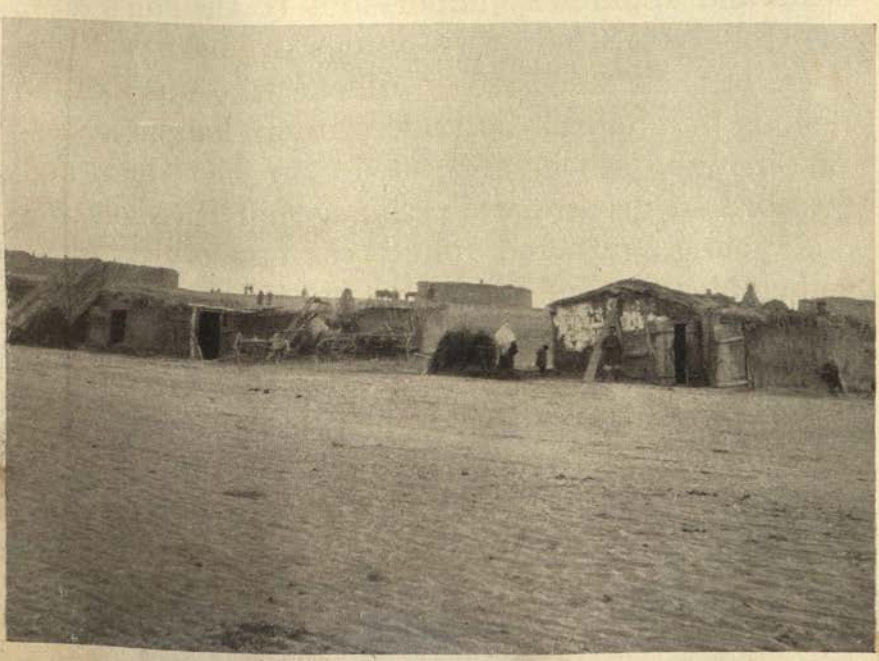
international politics should be taboo. The young German, who was of military age, had decided to leave at once for Omsk in order to report himself to his Consul for military service. But he confided to us that he had been eight months on end in Semipalatinsk, that he had found the time very irksome, and that he looked upon his journey to Omsk in the nature of an unexpected holiday. "I shall be back in three weeks," he said cheerily, "and I feel that I want a bit of fun." I fancy that his "fun" has lasted longer than three weeks, and if I mistake not he is wintering at a more remote spot than even Semipalatinsk.

Naturally the accommodation of the town was taxed to its utmost and we had to content ourselves, in fact we were lucky in getting, a very small room in the only hotel. This apartment was innocent of blinds or curtains, was on the ground floor and offered outsiders a fine view of what we were doing. But by this time we had become hardened and nothing of that nature troubled us. The evening of our arrival, by a wise decree, all the vodka shops had been shut and at noon next day the fiat went forth, no more beer, no more wine. This order appeared, at first sight, rather an unnecessary one since the beer is of the lightest German variety and a man would become sick before he became drunk. But, on the other hand, it was really sound policy, since it avoided discrimination between the well-to-do classes and the moujik, and with a stroke of the pen wiped out one possible cause of friction. Hence it was a sober, serious city which we saw tackle the realities of war and, be it said, they were tackled in a business-like fashion.

There was a surprising absence of that dilatoriness which is commonly supposed to be the hallmark of Russian officialdom. With the regularity of a well-oiled machine reservists entered one door of the low white building which housed the military headquarters and emerged at the other end, through another door, supplied with instructions where to report for service, warrants for steamship travel and a sufficiency of ready cash for their immediate use (25 kopecks—6d.—being their daily allowance). Outside, in the baking glare of an almost tropical sun, intensified by choking clouds of dust, a curious medley of races watched and waited patiently. Tartar women with veiled faces crouched in their springless carts with their eyes fixed on the fateful building. Khirgiz, those gipsies of the steppe, clad in sheep-skin caps and coats and apparently impervious to the sun's rays, sat stolidly on their wiry ponies or showed off the paces of their steeds to an officer who was already making purchases. Cossack women, looking cheerful enough, stood ankle-deep in the dust and gossiped in groups, while the actual Russians, old and young, gathered round each reservist as he came out and plied him with questions as to where he was to go and what he was to do.

The presence in the town of so many of these men caused some uneasiness to a certain section of the population since there had been rumours of trouble at Barnaoul, which subsequently proved to be correct. There the organisation had not been so perfect. The call to arms had been answered readily enough, in fact too readily. Hundreds of men had crowded in and had found that not sufficient food was procurable. This had

SEMIPALATINSK. GENERAL VIEW OF MOBILIZATION.



SEMIPALATINSK. THE KHIRGIZ QUARTER.

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irritated them and the prohibition of vodka did the rest. They stormed the vodka factory and helped themselves. After that hell was let loose. The offices of foreign merchants were burnt and many were killed in street fighting before order was restored. Much the same occurred at Novo Nicolaievsk, but the rioting was only a matter of twenty-four hours, and when it is remembered what a terrific change in the whole life of the community had been inaugurated by the stoppage of liquor and the call to arms, it speaks well that these two incidents were exceptions and not the rule. At Semipalatinsk the great mobilisation was carried out absolutely without incident and in the most even way possible, a mobilisation which, with its counterparts in other portions of Asiatic Russia, was to be responsible for an addition to the Russian army of about four millions of men.

Our returning to Omsk was in the nature of a problem. Thanks, however, to influence exerted on our behalf we were able to secure a cabin on a steamer conveying some three hundred reservists. We were told to go aboard overnight, and it was lucky we did so for with the first flush of dawn great crowds began to gather on the pristan (wharf). Nominally our departure had been fixed for nine-thirty, though it was not until twelve that we finally got under weigh. But in those two and a half hours enough emotion was crammed to satiate even the most material. A spectacle was provided so thrilling, and withal so inspiring, that for once one felt one was in very truth face to face with the soul of a people.

First of all the Governor arrived in full uniform and harangued the crowd in stirring words. This

was no war of aggression, he explained, for which the sons of Russia were needed; they were fighting for their brothers, they were fighting to crush the cruellest of oppressors and for that reason might start out in full confidence that Almighty God was with them. In the simplest of phrases and the most homely of language he exhorted those left behind to mourn to be of good cheer, and by their courage and self-control to emblazon the Russian flag with one more instance of the devotion of its womanhood. Then a band broke into the national hymn and with one accord the solemn words were chanted by a kneeling multitude. As the last strains died away a path through the throng opened as if by magic and priests, robed in green and gold, carrying ikons and a huge gilded cross, slowly advanced towards the ship, sprinkled it with holy water and again and again blessed its human freight. And as they did so, once more the national hymn was sung.

What wonder that even ordinary spectators like ourselves were moved beyond speech? What wonder that the stifled sobs of mothers, wives and daughters could not be restrained? And when father kissed son and brother brother it seemed allegorical of the early Christians and their kiss of peace which still is represented in the ritual of the Catholic Mass.

It was also small wonder that what with the heat and emotion, women became hysterical and fainted. One poor soul collapsed just outside our cabin, and we handed the lad to whom she was saying good-bye some water and a bottle of eau-de-Cologne. In spite of his feelings, he showed his inherent courtesy by acknowledging the gift with the respectful "blagodaru vas" (I thank

you) rather than with the usual word of thanks, "spasibo."

But perhaps the most touching of all were the old mothers. We saw one, she must have been well on in the seventies, a tottering, frail old thing who must have realised that her farewell was to be a long one. With that wonderful dignity which only age can inspire, she blessed her kneeling son while he covered her disengaged hand with kisses. The relation of this scene may seem banal to the reader months after the occurrence, but to us, who saw it, it will always possess something sacred about it, something for once outside the normal course of life. It was as though we had witnessed that most rare of occurrences, the momentary lifting of the veil hiding the holiest emotions of a nation.

As the steamer warped slowly out into the stream there was a mighty roar of cheering, a great ringing of bells, a shrieking from steam whistles and, trying to make itself heard above the din, the band again playing the hymn. Mounted Khirgiz, some on camels, dashed recklessly along the bank waving flags and whips, and as we turned the bend of the stream we could still distinguish the green and gold vestments of the priests giving their final benediction.

Our journey down-river to Omsk took four days, and we were not a little curious to see how the trip would pass off. In the first place the boat was crowded literally to suffocation, and the men were sleeping packed together like herrings in a barrel.

Secondly, the teetotal order applied equally to ships as well as to shops, and all spirits, wine and beer had been locked away. Though there was no question of the excellence of the order, its thorough-

ness was distinctly disconcerting! Deprive any men suddenly of their daily alcohol in whatsoever form it may be, and a certain amount of grumbling and criticism must naturally be expected. If every public-house in England were given twenty-four hours after which it must close its doors, what would happen? With what would happen, I am happily not concerned, but such peremptory legislation is a test to character, and we wondered not a little as to whether resentment would take tangible form.

Thirdly and lastly, we were obvious foreigners, and the moujik of these parts can scarcely be expected to be able to distinguish a German from a Frenchman or an Englishman from either. And since the Germans preponderate greatly, it is reasonable to suppose that whatever they found out afterwards, at first, they must have regarded us as Germans and their active enemies. I did see one man shake his fist at me, but he did it with a broad grin and evidently meant it in fun.

Well, in spite of these three facts above related, which might have been expected to arouse ugly feelings amongst these reservists, their behaviour throughout was exemplary. It must be added also that for the first two days and a half they had no officers to control them. In the dining saloon were two empty champagne bottles corked and gold-leafed over to represent real ones and supplied for advertisement purposes. They stood in nickel-silver buckets and evidently looked alluring to the thirsty men on the deck outside. Finally two of them ventured to come in and ask the steward whether the saloon passengers were having spirits when they were having nothing. Though a

SEMIPALATINSK. THE WHARF. RESERVISTS LEAVING.

SEMIPALATINSK. THE FERRY.

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that such was not the case and that all were being treated in a precisely similar manner, they viewed those bottles with the utmost suspicion and nothing would satisfy them but taking them up and shaking them vigorously. Finding nothing inside puzzled them. They appealed to us in most naïve fashion to solve the riddle.

Throughout, be it added, they were perfectly courteous and there was no sign of vice. They were like a lot of schoolboys, particularly on account of their shyness which was very apparent at first but gradually wore off. At length, curiosity overcame them and one of them asked us where we were going and who we were. We told them that we were English on our way back to our own country, and that our country was helping theirs. Yes, they had heard of the English but they did not know that we were friends though they were very glad to hear it. Then one of their number, more learned than the others, said he knew all about the English and that they were people very similar to the dwellers on the shores of the White Sea. They had ships also, big ships, bigger even than that upon which we were travelling though he did not think any larger than the *Ivan Korniloff*, which was evidently the accepted standard of great magnitude.

My wife started to do some simple puzzles with a piece of string, which they followed with tremendous interest. One of them thrust forward a big, horny hand in order that one of the tricks might be practised on him, which he turned out to be quick enough to spot. After that our relations were entirely friendly, and they were a constant source of amusement to us. There was one place which was forbidden to them—the captain's bridge

—and precisely because it was forbidden territory they insisted on going there; they swarmed up the stanchions and sat upon the flimsy superstructure, threatening thereby to break it down. The captain shouted and swore, but it had not the least effect; they cracked their sunflower seeds as though nothing was the matter, and as fast as they were turned off one place, with shrieks of delight they turned up in another. A passing boat was a great event. One and all they crowded to the side, cheered and exchanged chaff and messages.

At night, a strange atmosphere of romance enveloped the boat as though with a cloak. Was it indeed possible that from these peaceful starlit surroundings, we were hurrying with our human freight towards fields of blood and suffering? It was so quiet! On the banks little bonfires twinkled, and sometimes out of the darkness would come voices—"Is Pavel Ivanitch on board?" one would enquire. And after a moment the reply would go back, "Yes, it is Pavel Ivanitch who speaks—who wants him?" Then as we sped downstream would come the answer in fainter tones, "Your friend, Anton Pavlovitch—God be with you."

And again silence would descend upon the surroundings, broken only by the soft plash of the water as it was tossed aside by the sharp prow of the steamer. Wonderful nights those were, the stars seemed so near, so friendly, so pregnant with love, with tenderness, with the promise of eternity. And the reality, as day dawned, so terrible, so cruel and so draped with the trappings of woe.

At Pavlodar a Cossack officer came aboard, and he will always stand out in our memory as a great little man. He was clean-shaven, rubicund, fat

and jolly-looking; he reminded us of a well-known purser in a Trans-Atlantic steamer in which we had often crossed. Within two hours he had his flock under such wonderful command that I believe, had they been asked to storm an enemy position as they were and without arms, they would have obeyed and done their best without hesitation.

His treatment of them was parental, it reminded me of early schoolroom days; he read to them,—many of the men were illiterate,—and then he told them funny little stories which evoked roars of laughter. After that he made them sing choruses, assured them that war was not so bad as it had been painted, in fact might be said to possess some compensations. And he wound up by impressing upon them that when they arrived at Omsk they must remember to treat any foreigners they saw with respect and courtesy.

The burden of his song was somewhat after this fashion. "By and by you will enter the territory of these Germans, and you will then be able to repay lawfully some of the cruelty and suffering meted out by those people to our unarmed citizens who were unhappy enough to be caught by them. Till then be patient, and above all remember that the harder you fight when the time comes, the quicker you will be able to return to your home." Then he took them individually in hand, and every man with a grievance or worry was separately interviewed, talked to and literally comforted. He was the father and mother of his men so completely by the time they had to leave the steamer that, robbed of its pathos, it was really funny. We met that same officer later, and complimented him upon his success. "Poor fellows," he said, "they have to

fight a long way from home, and," with a suspicion of a twinkle, "you know we Cossacks are not quite so bad as our friends sometimes paint us." Men of that stamp are worth an army corps to any country, and it so happens that Russia is liberally endowed with them.

Within the short space of barely three weeks Omsk had undergone a metamorphosis. From being a great commercial centre it had been transformed into a huge military camp. At all times it is the head-quarters of the West Siberian military district, and under those normal conditions there would probably be a military population of some eight or ten thousand. But now the exigencies of the situation demanded that 150,000 men should be quartered in and around the town, reservists mostly, who were being equipped and sent away as fast as possible. Excluding these troops, many thousands daily were already pouring through from Irkutsk and the Trans-Baikal districts. The destination of these battalions was not immediately to be the front. They were sent away, we were told, to a vast camp in the south of Russia, Kharkoff was mentioned, where their drill was freshened up, and where they received the latest instruction which should render them worthy to be included in the main fighting machine.

Only latterly have I seen a statement in a daily paper which was discussing Russia's difficulties in a pessimistic strain. It stated that the Trans-Siberian line was still a single track. That is quite incorrect!!

For the greater portion of the distance the line has been doubled, and where this has not been the case, miles of siding and alternative routes have greatly facilitated quick transport.

SEMIPALATINSK. "GOOD-BYE."
Child waving farewell to its father *en route* for the war.

A SIBERIAN TARTAR.

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For instance, from Omsk to Petrograd there are three routes which cross the Urals, all of which were made use of by the military authority, the most northerly—over which we had previously travelled—being the least direct. But there has been recently completed a short cut from Ekaterinburg to Perm, affording a great saving of time, whilst the old Cheliabinsk-Moscow route offers certain advantages since it touches at several large towns, affording easy accommodation for the refreshment of troops. At any rate, during the first stage of the war Omsk could legitimately claim to be dealing with twenty or twenty-five troop trains a day, not inclusive of enormous quantities of goods and war material, which must have eaten a tremendous hole in the rolling stock of the system. There may have been some dislocation and certain regular trains were cancelled, but it does stand on record that Omsk took the strain in a remarkable way, and confusion was conspicuous by its absence.

On arrival at our hotel from up-river we had a shock. Though we had left a good deal of baggage in charge of the proprietor, we were informed, with profuse apologies, that all the rooms had been commandeered by the military. We were further cheered by the information that lodging was practically impossible to find. It was not in the least surprising, but it promised to be serious for us since, in addition, we were short of money and had not sufficient to purchase tickets to Petrograd. From this quandary we were rescued by the good offices of Mr. A. C. Jordan, who was acting as British Consul, and Mr. George Atkinson, whose joint kindnesses we can never repay and shall never forget. The former, whose constant hospitality we

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enjoyed, had no room in his house, or I know that we should have been welcome to stay there just so long as we liked. The latter came down to the hotel, where he had his office, and asked us to use it temporarily till something better could be found. He accomplished wonders, even more than our carte blanche, and through his influence we were subsequently supplied with a very comfortable room.

The next question which worried us was finance. The Russian banks had practically closed to all business. The bank in England telegraphed that it was impossible to transmit money, and though our friends offered to share and share alike with us, they also were none too happy about the future. Eventually, to cut a long story short, through the good offices of Mr. Brown, of the International Harvester Company at Omsk, and also the generous speeding up of the whole matter in Chicago by Mr. McCormick, director of the aforesaid company, through their agency we were enabled to draw from their local branch as much money as we required.

Such courtesy was the more delightful inasmuch as it was extended to us by those not of our own nationality.

These anxieties having been removed, we had ample opportunity of studying the life of the town under its changed conditions.

It is impossible for those who saw all that was passing to withhold from the Governor-General, General Schmidt, the highest and most eulogistic praise. Never has a situation been so beautifully taken in hand. There never was the least sign of trouble of any form, kind or description, and there never could have been. Even at the time of the

quasi-revolution which disturbed Russia in 1906, when, in Omsk itself, there were threats and menaces, when seditious placards were pasted in the streets during the night, and when a plot was discovered, organised by students, to set fire to the opera-house during a gala performance at which it was known all the military chiefs would be present, nothing actually ever occurred. General Schmidt and his Cossacks had summed up the crisis to a nicety, and the leaders were unearthed and shot in the shortest, promptest and most unobtrusive way, thereby preventing all possibility of an outbreak.

And so again, with thousands of men and no vodka, a state of affairs was in being which needed cautious handling. The only casualties of which I am aware were two men who died from overdrinking methylated spirit.

Upon one evening only did we notice signs of what might have developed into a fracas. At the public garden in Omsk, wherein the band plays, there is a charge for entry of fifteen kopecks. A crowd of reservists resented not being allowed to enter at a charge of ten kopecks, and accordingly rushed the pay-box, brushed aside the two or three police and thereby got in for nothing. It was more horseplay than anything, and the mischief amongst them can be estimated from the statement that as soon as they saw my wife trying to make her way through them to effect an exit from the gardens, they parted their ranks immediately of their own accord and made a pathway. Next evening there were two mounted Cossacks in front of the garden, but, needless to add, no reservists!!!

Human nature is much the same the entire world

over, and the rumours we heard in Omsk were of a rich and extremely sensational quality. But that which gained the greatest hold and was firmly believed by even otherwise well-informed persons was the following. A waiter in our hotel first it was who whispered into our ears, "Have you heard about the Japanese, Barin?" "What about them?" was our natural answer. "Well," he continued, "my brother Ivan, you know, is employed as a shunter at the railway station. He told me that every night for the last week two troop trains have passed through going to Petrograd. All the blinds were pulled down, but he saw some officers—Japanese. And besides that the station buffet have orders to supply rice, much rice. Now, you know that the Japanese eat rice, Barin, so you can put two and two together, can't you, eh?"

And with that he went off to his duties with an air of thorough self-satisfaction at being in the possession of important news not known to every Dick, Tom and Harry.

At first we absolutely discredited it, but steadily the rumour grew; it passed and repassed. And eventually it was corroborated even by Russian officers who, while they were eating their zakouski, would say with a grave shake of the head, "Yes, we believe it is true!" Though why Japanese should be going to the front, when such an action would be like sending coals to Newcastle, and when there were dozens of Siberian corps equipped and awaiting transport, no one appeared able to explain. The climax arrived when a lady of position told us with her finger to her lips, that she had ascertained the facts to be as reported direct from the wife of the Governor.

That practically converted us, when Fate happened to throw us in the way of a senior officer on the General Staff. He was tremendously amused, and bubbled with merriment that we English should have been so easily taken in by what he called "silly café talk." Those ghostly Japanese battalions bear a close resemblance to the phantom Russian army corps which were reputed to have travelled to England via Archangel, and which were distinguished by the fact that they were "playing on samovars," and were further identified by having gnawed the wood of the railway carriages ! ! !

One night, to be precise about two in the morning, there was a knock at our bedroom door. Personally, I was asleep, but my wife answered the summons, and found outside two soldiers and a police officer. As soon as they saw her they apologised profusely for having disturbed her, said that they had made a mistake, but vouchsafed no further explanation. Next morning we heard what had happened. Throughout the town of Omsk all Germans, except the women-folk, had been arrested and placed for safety in the fortress. This was accomplished at night, because it was the desire of the Governor-General that the process should be carried out in such a way as would ensure the prisoners from being subjected to the gaze of the curious and to possible insult from the public.

For it must be remembered that at the time the papers were full of reports as to the brutal treatment which the Germans had shown to inoffensive Russian civilians, let alone officials, who had been unfortunate enough to find themselves in German territory at the moment of the outbreak of the war.

Since then these facts have all been verified, forming a page in Russo-German relations which it will take many years, probably many generations, to obliterate. Nothing made feeling run higher than the narration of these horrors, which are without parallel in the diplomatic annals of civilised countries. It was recalled how when Japan declared war on Russia, Baron Rosen, the then Russian ambassador at Tokyo, had been escorted to the railway station by the authorities together with members of many of the embassies, how a full salute had been fired in his honour, and how throughout that period of tension the Russians had been treated with the greatest correctness and humanity and in accordance with the strictest interpretation of international law.

The comparison of one of the members of the Russian embassy leaving Berlin and being beaten over the head with an umbrella, causing him serious physical injury, makes one think. Thus does the East, on occasion, teach the West, causing one to realise that the so-called, much-advertised civilisation of the German is a poor cloak to their innate savagery. The old adage, "Scratch a Russian and you find a Tartar," needs remodelling into something à propos to the Teuton character.

Throughout, the action of the local administration was most considerate, though in some instances it was resented by the people, and we could not help sympathising. Our valet was an old soldier, who had fought in the Russo-Japanese War, and had been wounded to the point of incapacitation for further military service. But he was a keen patriot.

"Barin," he said, "there is a German woman four doors down the corridor who is allowed to remain here

TARTAR WOMEN WATCHING THE MOBILIZATION AT SEMIPALATINSK.

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and who is the biggest bully in the place. She worries us all the entire day. Her husband has been taken and long may he remain away, but why has the Government not given him his wife ? She complains and complains!! It is hard, Barin, to be polite to her. You have only to see her to know she is all bad. Think how her people treated our ladies, and I am expected to treat her with the same courtesy I would show my mother. May God punish them ! "

Without going so far as our friend the valet, never shall we forget the venomous glances the lady paid us. She lacked even the saving grace of humour and antagonised, we happen to know, some who might have been her friends and of service to her.

The German Consul in Omsk, a gentleman in a large way of business, found himself in a particularly awkward position. In spite of constant telegrams to Count Pourtalés, his ambassador in Petrograd, as much as a week before the declaration of war, he received not the slightest recognition, being left to learn that war had broken out from the official Russian communiqué. The German Consuls in other places like Orenburg and Vladivostock received precisely similar treatment, which in itself throws an unpleasant sidelight upon German officialdom. At Vladivostock the Consul took affairs into his own hands and left for China, but of necessity the Omsk Consul was interned. In his hour of difficulty, it is worth remarking, he went to his British colleague for advice, and it is equally worthy of notice that the latter gentleman reassured the German official's wife, and was able to make such arrangements that his former colleague, who was a merchant, was not irretrievably ruined.

For the rest, once under lock and key the Germans were allowed the greatest of latitude. They were permitted to smoke and read, to receive visits, to have their food sent in from outside, if they wished, to play games, in fact everything was done to render bearable their enforced confinement. I believe that in the German papers the most lying reports were circulated as to what happened to their countrymen in Siberia, hence it is a special pleasure to be in a position to place on record the actual facts. Later on, I understood, the authorities proposed to transport these people to a town called Tara, situated about half-way between Tobolsk and Omsk, on the River Irtish. Once there they would receive their full freedom, being only restricted from leaving the settlement, which during the winter months would be practically impossible, since the only post-road would naturally be guarded. At the same time one can only compare the position of these people with the treatment of our own civilians in Germany. So odious is the comparison that it scarcely bears thinking about, and one can only hope that when the time comes to discuss peace terms these facts may also supply their quota towards the reckoning of the indemnity.

Omsk in its war clothing was something unforgettable. From a window one could watch the new activity of a newly awakened life. Endless processions of ammunition wagons guarded by Cossacks and headed by a rider with a red flag passed along the streets. As often as not, moreover, there could be seen a couple of sleepy soldiers, drowsy from the sun, smoking cigarettes lazily as they lay upon the ammunition boxes. They and the red flag supplied the essence of that spirit

of paradox which is the key of the Russian character.

And at other moments would emerge from side streets quaint processions of chanting moujiks, headed by priests with banners and in full regalia. They might herald a reported success or they might merely be emphasising the appeal of Orthodox Christianity to the God of Battles for victory.

But they were undeniably picturesque. They were dignified and they coloured the entire picture to the blasé Westerner, showing him that, no matter what manners and customs might be common further towards the Occident, in some cases and in some places the Orient triumphed with its amazing appeal to the heart, sweeping away cold logic in an overwhelming tide of faith and earnestness, which of itself should prove the sacredness of its claim on mankind.

Emphatically Omsk is not a picturesque town, emphatically it is not romantic, emphatically is it commonplace and commercial, but emphatically had the halo of war uplifted it, sanctified it and purged it of its dross.

CHAPTER XV

HOMEWARD BOUND

WE had imagined that we should experience great difficulty in leaving Omsk. We had heard wonderful stories of people waiting for days and days in railway stations trying to get accommodation, and of how when, at last, they boarded their trains, they were lucky if they were able to lie in the corridors. To such exaggeration there was no limit, and we were actually told a story of an Englishman who made the journey to Petrograd on the luggage rack!!

We certainly took the precaution of going to the station and seeing the Nachalnik the day before we wished to start, and he most courteously assured us that the express for Petrograd would arrive as usual, and that he did not think it would be more than an hour or an hour and a half late. For the rest, he said, "Get your baggage down in plenty of time, and I will see that you suffer as little inconvenience as possible."

This charming old gentleman, who, at the moment, was bearing the responsibilities connected with this big station upon his shoulders, was as good as his word. On the day of our departure, after having registered our luggage, we passed an hour in the buffet, and a very few minutes later than under normal conditions the express steamed in. The

Nachalnik was on the look-out for us, and we were shown to the coupé, one of the most comfortable imaginable, which we occupied during the whole of the journey. We certainly saw no signs of the stranded passengers who had been waiting for days, although that story was corroborated at Petrograd, so it must have been that we were singularly lucky. But that we had been all along. Travelling by our train were two generals, one of whom was to take command of a portion of the army operating in Galicia, while the other, with whom we made great friends, belonged to the Russian General Staff.

I wish I had the aptitude of drawing a thoroughly good pen-picture in order that I might give some idea of this delightful soldier. By birth he was a Cossack, and he had seen service in Central Asia under General Kuropatkin, in China and, needless to say, in Japan, where his services had gained for him the Cross of St. George, the Russian equivalent of the Victoria Cross. He confessed to speaking four languages fluently, French, German, Turkish and Persian, and added that he knew a smattering of Chinese, Italian, English and Urdu, though, judging by the standard of his English, which was almost perfect, his idea of a smattering was an exalted one. He was a short, sinewy little man with close-cropped grey hair and a clipped grey moustache. He was bronzed almost to the colour of a penny, and it was easy to see that he was built of steel and wire. That this was no delusion was exemplified by the fact that he cheerfully ate some fish one day at dinner, fish which had not seen its native element, I should imagine, for many months. He, however, tackled it with gusto,

his only comment being, "Better than we shall get in the trenches ! ! "

He had the keenest sense of humour imaginable, and as he told a story his eyes always twinkled with delight, even though it might be something against himself. I happened to mention that I was writing a book, which tickled his fancy and he said, "That interests me very much ; I am a bit of an author myself." Asked where his book might be procured and what it was about, he replied, "It is a little work on India, but I don't think you could buy it, since it is in the archives of the Russian General Staff." He knew India from end to end, and spoke warmly of friendships he had made with British officers, many of whom are now prominent in the public eye. He was never tired of eulogising the courtesy and kindness he had been shown there, and when it had been pointed out to his host at Quetta that his presence in that place was not altogether pleasing to the authorities, he was quite diplomat enough to appreciate the situation and to leave at once.

His only comment to me was, "Had the positions been reversed and a British officer in a Russian post of similar importance, my attitude would have been exactly the same as that of your Commander-in-Chief's."

But there was a sequel to this trip of his to India which is not without its humour. He had badly wanted to get certain photographs, but had loyally adhered to the stipulation that on no account should he make use of a camera. "I was very sorry about that," he said, "but as an officer and a gentleman there was clearly nothing else to be done. However, funny things do happen in life,

and some time later we became involved in war with Japan. Amongst our first captures at sea was a steamer which had come from India, and upon which was a Japanese officer who also had been making a tour in those parts. Oddly enough he had the precise photographs in his possession which I needed, and so I was able to complete my book. Let me add, however, I also sent copies of the photographs to your English War Office."

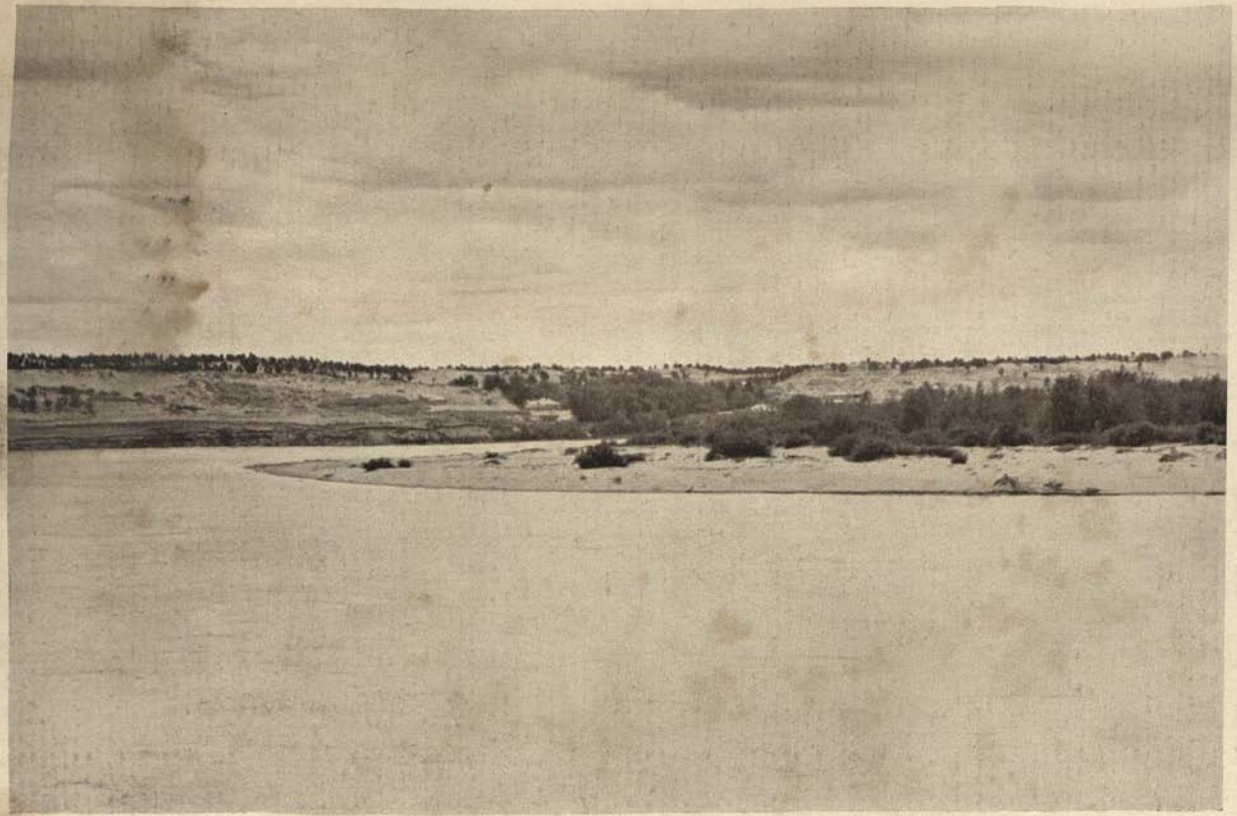
In Lord Kitchener he had immense belief. "He is a wonderful man," he said, "and England is lucky in possessing him but, my goodness," he added with a laugh, "he is a hard one!" About the British Army he was equally enthusiastic. "None better—what there is of it," he used to say. "They have that wonderful dash which overcomes apparently insuperable and unsurmountable obstacles. Also, in my opinion, gun for gun the British artillery is equal to, if not better than, any in the world. I wish only that there was more of it. Yes, British dash and tenacity will accomplish a great deal in this war."

Then he would tell us much about his own troops. "They're all right," he would say confidently. "The Cossacks supply the élan, which is not usually found in the Russian character, but the ordinary soldiery supply the dogged determination which makes of them wonderful men behind trenches and renders them impervious to panic. They may be defeated, they may lose hundreds of thousands of men, but—they never run."

As to the war, without being a blind optimist, which a man of his experience necessarily could not be, he was quietly confident of the result. He was the type of individual who would sternly discourage

dogmatic assurances of easy victory, and was tremendously against the complacent effusions which, in the early stages of the war, were to be found in the papers of practically all the combatants. The time of which I am speaking happened to be shortly after the first Russian defeat in Eastern Prussia by von Hindenburg. It naturally cropped up in conversation, and while not denying the terrible loss of life and regretting it on that account, he otherwise regarded it lightly.

"This is like no other war," he would say, "you must expect to see losses of thousands and thousands, but as far as we are concerned it won't influence the final result. In the Japanese War, for a variety of reasons, many of which are obvious, we had little chance of success; but we have changed all that. For one thing our officers have improved extraordinarily, proof of which you will see in due course, and in the second place our soldiers know whom they are fighting, and, so to speak, it is a popular war. As far as the actual operations are concerned, watch particularly what happens on the Austrian frontier. There are a great many Siberian troops there. If I mistake not, our Siberian troops are going to surprise the Germans very unpleasantly. There are so many veterans amongst them and they are terribly tough material. It is quite understandable that you are impatient and want to see some tremendous victory. Well, I don't think that those giant *débâcles* of former times are likely to occur in this war. It is going to be a long business, and 'Berlin in six months' is all twaddle. Berlin in a year would spell a stupendous success. Think of our difficulties. As soon as we cross the enemy's frontier the advantages



RIVER IRTISH. TYPICAL SCENERY.

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are all on their side and the disadvantages all on ours. Their railway system is a highly specialised organisation which has been developed solely upon military and strategic lines. They can transport their men from any one point to any other point with ease and celerity; we cannot! Our railway communications in Poland are few and far between, and lateral railways are conspicuous by their absence. Common-sense, I expect, suggests to you that the only way by which we can render nugatory the tremendous transport advantages of the enemy is by fighting in our own territory, where they will be compelled to meet us on equal terms. Hence, don't be downhearted if you see Poland turned into a gigantic battle-field. You cannot make an omelette without breaking eggs. This is the biggest omelette the world has ever seen, and we in Russia are prepared to put into it every egg we have if it is necessary."

We ventured to ask him how many men he thought Russia could put into the field. His reply took the form of a counter-question. He made us clamber out of the train at a wayside halt where, in a siding, stood a troop train. Going up to a soldier he said to me, "What is the number on this man's shoulder-strap? One hundred and twenty-seven!! Very well, then. That will give you some idea of how the mobilisation is proceeding. The number signifies the division, and there are about 20,000 men in a division. Therefore, were all the men up to and including this division at the front, that would give a total of over two and a half millions. And, of course, there are numerous units not yet recruited to their full strength, numerous units in training elsewhere, and I am not suggesting

in the least that the figure 127 represents the top number of the divisions already mobilised. But you asked a question and, haphazard, this may give you some slight idea of what is being done.

"One of the greatest difficulties we shall have to overcome will be the arming of all our men. That's a long job, and the war came before we were in any way prepared. But, even so, there can be only one ending, and I should like to think that the Emperor would sign the Peace treaty in Berlin, just as his ancestor, Alexander I, did in Paris." Then he broke off and a grim little smile hovered over his lips as he remarked almost to himself, "War is a great game; I wonder whom we shall be fighting next."

During that long journey to Petrograd we had ample opportunity of watching every type of Russian soldiery. We must have passed some hundreds of troop trains, and they all presented a similar spectacle. Mostly their occupants were Siberians, and they were literally magnificent men. Well above medium height, without an ounce of superfluous flesh, they carried themselves like trained athletes. As an American mining engineer succinctly phrased it, "Those fellows would bite the end off a red-hot poker." Their attitude was rather like that of school children at a mammoth picnic party. Looking at them cursorily, no one would have thought that these were men going out to meet a dangerous foe, and it was hard to realise that a great proportion of them would never return to their homes.

If their dietary was not of the most varied character, consisting as a rule of a chunk of black bread washed down with the inevitable tea, a bowl of soup being supplied at irregular intervals and as

a great luxury, it was much the same as that to which they had been usually accustomed, and it was spiced with that best of all sauces, strange scenes, strange faces and, as a future, the absolute unknown. To send them into the seventh heaven of happiness it was only necessary to throw them a ten-day-old paper and a few cigarettes. The former would be most carefully smoothed out, and then would be read aloud by the erudite to an interested throng, whilst the latter, if perchance somewhat mangled in the struggle for possession, rendering them unsmokable, were not wasted, and were made to do service by being chewed. In short, they were a happy, light-hearted, independent—mark the word—lot of men, the absolute antithesis of those they were about to meet.

Travelling also in our train was a gentleman from Vladivostock who was officially interested in the problem of Russia's supplies during the winter, a problem which I have already thrashed out at some length earlier in this volume. And it only serves to show how vast a country Russia is, and how little its remoter portions are known even to educated and intelligent men, when I mention the fact that he had never heard of the port of Alexandrovsk, and that he told me that, on arrival at Petrograd, it was his intention to bring before the Minister of Ways and Communications the great possibilities of this harbour not only during the war but at all times.

Finally, amongst our fellow-passengers I must not forget an officer belonging to the Russian Air Fleet. He was a large-boned, rather stout, positively jovial-looking person who wore the very tightest of

blue breeches and a very short khaki coat. He might almost have stepped out of one of Caldecott's Nursery Books. I should imagine that he must have been absolutely impervious to anything in the shape of nerves, though that trait is a commonplace amongst all these Russian airmen. His philosophy was a simple one; it might almost be said to be summed up in the words, "If you come down, you come down." In a confidential manner he assured me that after a very late night and when, as he put it, "your tongue tastes like copper," he found nothing so good in the way of a cure as a flight. I suggested that under those conditions, surely he might be a bit wobbly. Then it was that he enunciated his theory of "Nichevo."

In conversation with the representative in Russia of the Curtis Hydroplane Company I learnt that this really is a fact; the chances of an accident never disturb Russian aviators in the least, and the great difficulty is to prevent their going up when it is positively dangerous. Even non-commissioned officers, who have not the intellect or engineering experience of the commissioned aviator, will, if permitted, take up machines in any sort of weather after perhaps a couple of lessons. Naturally this results in a great amount of damage to limb and machine, but this gentleman propounded the theory that there is something to be said for the old way of teaching youngsters to swim, i.e. dropping them into the water and letting them struggle. This was the invariable custom at a naval school at which I was educated, and I think it made of us more self-reliant swimmers than had we undergone a long course of tuition. And perhaps this theory, applied to Russian aeronautics, may have something in it,

for the Russian never regards facts in a precisely similar way to that common amongst other nations. He always seems to argue from effect to cause rather than from cause to effect.

For instance, a passenger steamer crowded with people struck a mine whilst entering a Black Sea port, sinking with great loss of life, a disaster of the first magnitude. In conversation with a friend the subject was mentioned, and we expressed our sorrow that such a thing should have occurred.

"But how?" said the friend. "I don't call that so bad. Personally I had some doubts as to the efficacy of our mines, but now I know that the port of —— is safe enough from a foreign attack." Which certainly is one way of regarding a calamity!

Our aviation officer was tremendously enthusiastic over the Ilya Mourmets, the giant airship invented by a young Russian engineer of the name of Sigorsky. This huge biplane can carry thirty-six men, and is driven by four 90 horse-power engines. It has cabins after the pattern of those on a ship and must be the nearest approach, at present, to the phantasmagoria of Jules Verne's brain. Already it has successfully travelled from Petrograd to Kief, and it goes without saying that, were it able to live up to its reputation, it would prove a very terrible and most practical engine of war. As I write, I have seen no reports of what it has accomplished, but probably for obvious reasons these have been kept secret by the Russian authorities. However, as a menace one would imagine that it would be far more effective than the Zeppelin bogey which, to use American slang, seems to have had its foundation in "hot air."

We reached Petrograd at the cheery hour of half-past three in the morning, having lost more and more time the nearer we approached our destination. As we drove along the Nevsky to our hotel the city seemed strangely deserted, for Petrograd goes in greatly for night amusements and, as a rule, night literally is turned into day. But that had all changed, and the only occupants of the broad, handsome thoroughfare were the street-sweepers. Excepting, however, for the partial cessation of the café life, Petrograd showed little signs of the war. There were, perhaps, a few more soldiers to be seen, and, except at the first-class hotels, vodka and even wine and beer were not to be had.

One outstanding feature there was, which made itself felt even to the foreigner. It was that, in an indefinable fashion, Petrograd, as representing Russia, had steadied itself. It was easy to see that, metaphorically, Russian and Tartar, Pole and Lett, Jew and Gentile had buttoned up their coats as men who are about to withstand some shock. The labour troubles which in July had caused the Government intense anxiety, when barricades had actually been erected in streets contiguous to the Nevsky, and when the flames of an industrial war had begun to lick hungrily at centres like Moscow, Odessa and Tula, had ceased as if by magic. Leaders and followers had merged their own grievances and whole-heartedly had thrown their ambitions into the mighty melting-pot of war, whence doubtless they will emerge purified and ennobled by that supreme act of self-denial. And it was this feeling which made itself apparent, not only amongst the workmen, but amongst all classes. Whatever action might be taken by the authorities, irrespec-

tive of personal inconvenience, was certain to be regarded favourably, since it was for the public weal.

It so happened that at about this time the Czar's manifesto to the Poles was issued and hailed with the wildest of enthusiasm. I chanced to go into the Catholic church in the Nevsky, and became witness of a moving scene. For long the Polish hymn had been anathema, but now that ban was removed, and over and over again the kneeling congregation chanted it, accompanied by the organ. And then came the recitation of one of those interminable litanies of which the Poles are so fond, but which on this occasion was bearable on account of the intensity of emotion which accompanied it; there was a sort of fierce fervour which enveloped everyone, perhaps not far removed from hysteria, but which gave the key only too plainly to Polish aspirations.

The single outbreak of anything in the nature of popular violence against the Germans was the sacking of their Embassy. This great pretentious building facing the St. Isaac Square had long been an eyesore to the Petrograder who, in its enormous bronze statues surmounting the main façade, saw only emblems of Teutonic bombast. The group consisted of two horses reined in by two warriors, the whole of heroic size. Popular feeling had pictured them as being allegorical of France and Russia restrained by Germany. With the departure of the German ambassador and his staff came the opportunity to do away with the hated symbols, and it must be admitted that the operation was carried out in a thoroughly workmanlike manner. We were not

eye-witnesses of the scene, but a friend of ours described it in great detail. He called it the " most orderly disorder " he had ever beheld. An enormous crowd assembled in the Nevsky, and with bands and patriotic banners proceeded to the St. Isaac Square. There, the ringleaders, the police having discreetly withdrawn, broke in the side door of the Embassy and, armed with crowbars, made their way to the roof. A patient and silent crowd awaited below. One of the operators from the top shouted out that the statues, like most German pretensions, were hollow. This raised a cheer ! ! A couple of minutes hard work and the great warriors were seen to sway ominously. Another minute and over they toppled on to the pavement with a resounding, reverberating crash amidst a hurricane of cheers and hand-clapping. This accomplished, some of the more unruly members of the crowd also forced their way into the Embassy, making havoc of its interior, throwing out of the windows indiscriminately tapestries, pictures, bric-à-brac, and even a grand piano. It was then that the police were called out and order restored.

There was one grim mystery attached to the occasion, namely the finding later of the dead body of the former messenger to the Embassy, himself half a German. He may have been killed by the rioters but, on the other hand, there are those who avow that the body had been dead for some days, which would cast an unpleasant suspicion over his former masters, since he was supposed to have been in possession of a good many inconvenient diplomatic secrets. However that may be, it must be remembered that, at the time of this single outburst, more and more

evidence of hideous German cruelties had been accumulating, causing popular passion to run very high. Later a proposal, and a most reasonable one, was put forward that the building should be used as a hospital. The American Ambassador, however, vetoed the suggestion somewhat tactlessly, thus causing some resentment at a moment when, of all others, from a financial and commercial point of view, let alone from a diplomatic aspect, America should have stood well with the authorities at Petrograd. The Hotel Astoria, owned by a German company, and which boasted of being the biggest thing of the kind in Russia, was temporarily turned into a hospital, until through some subtle financial jugglery it was taken over, nominally by a French company, and partially reopened.

The treatment meted out to Germans domiciled in the capital and the neighbourhood, who must have numbered many thousands, was courtesy and consideration itself. Not only were they allowed an entire week in which to make preparations for their departure, but they were given the choice of three cities wherein they might dwell during the period of hostilities. These were Vologda, Viatka and Orenburg. It goes without saying that since Vologda was nearest to Petrograd, this town became at once the popular rendezvous somewhat, as I shall show later, to the chagrin and annoyance of its inhabitants. In contradistinction to Omsk the personal liberty of these enemies was not interfered with, the same regulations applying to those even of military age.

Leaving Russia at this precise moment was not the easiest task imaginable. There was a route

across the Gulf of Bothnia, and thence via Sweden and Norway, but several ships had been reported stopped by German cruisers and all English of military age interned. Hence we decided after careful consideration that the longest way round would probably prove the shortest way home, and that we would travel via Archangel. True, this was before there was any regular communication between Archangel and England but, knowing the port well, besides having friends there, we anticipated that we should have little difficulty in finding a ship of sorts bound for an English port. Leaving Petrograd, however, for Vologda was by no means as pleasant as our arrival. In the meantime the regular train service had been suspended, and communication thither was kept up as circumstances permitted. A first-class ticket entitled one to any sort of accommodation, from a cattle truck to a dining-car. However, the journey had to be made, and we were lucky, after a couple of hours of pushing and struggling, to get two seats in a second-class carriage. We had been told that railway connection with Archangel was also upside down, which would necessitate our staying in Vologda, which again might offer some difficulties, owing to the great number of Germans who had already arrived there.

Normally, Vologda is one of the pleasantest of little provincial Russian towns. It is clean and cosy; an abundance of exceptionally well-built villas overlook prettily-wooded boulevards, and its atmosphere is one of quiet and prosperous content. That is, however, under normal conditions. The Vologda the acquaintance of which we were to make on this occasion had quite lost its identity. The German invasion had added five or six thousand

to its habitual population, and its inhabitants were wearing a perpetual frown, for though the Germans, no doubt, felt their position keenly, it is perfectly certain that they did not feel it more keenly than the Vologdians themselves. It is quite impossible to control the emotions and natural impulses of others. A law may be made of a beneficial and humane character, and it may be carried out according to the letter and yet, in its essence, it may be entirely disregarded. Thus, a humane Government had offered this pleasant little centre as a residence to the Germans, but it could not obviously interfere with the attitude of its inhabitants towards the new-comers. And nothing is more overwhelmingly unpleasant than to find oneself deliberately and emphatically boycotted.

We had an object-lesson in this as soon as we arrived. We drove to a well-known hostelry, the Zolotoy Yakor—the Golden Anchor—and enquired for rooms. "Are you Germans?" was the immediate query. "Do we look like Germans?" was our equally prompt reply. "Well, there's no knowing who's who just now," was the somewhat suspicious rejoinder. "Where are your passports? Oh, English, are you? That's a different matter altogether. We'll find room for you somehow and welcome. The place is being painted, so you must not mind if the room is a small one."

As a matter of fact it was a small one, an inconveniently small one, and I slept on the floor, but we were glad to find any sort of shelter. In the restaurant, which incidentally was a capital one, the same question was asked before one took one's seat at a table, "Are you German? If so, we can't serve you here." Perfectly courteous and ex-

tremely effective. This system permeated the entire settlement, and the Germans, many of whom were men of considerable wealth, were compelled to combine and run messes, whilst as for lodging, one and all had been obliged to manage as well as they could in workmen's cottages situated in the lowest quarter of the town. Thus did the good folk of Vologda show their resentment at their visitors, who, amongst other things, had been the means of forcing up the prices and increasing an already over-taxed demand. In fact, wise were they who chose distant Orenburg, where in all probability the colony being much smaller, they would not have experienced the same difficulties.

From Vologda to Archangel again kindly fortune watched over us and we reached our destination without incident. Then came the search for a steamer. There were a few English vessels loading, but the accommodation upon these had already been booked many times over. Happily however a friend, knowing that we were good sailors and had made several voyages in tramp steamers, introduced us to a Swedish captain whose ship was going to Cardiff laden with timber. We will call her the *Hjalmar*, since, I believe, she was not supposed by the owners to carry passengers, and the good-hearted skipper only consented because he saw that we were in a difficult predicament. Further, he turned out of his cabin, which actually boasted of a proper bed, for the benefit of my wife. That this cabin was situated immediately over the propeller was not his fault, and the kindness of his action we shall never forget.

The *Hjalmar* was a craft of about 2000 tons, and many, many years ago had belonged to the British

mercantile marine. In this respect the Swedes and Norwegians are quite wonderful. They will buy what the British owner regards as a worn-out vessel, and under their management it receives a new lease of life and lasts, maybe, for another twenty years.

Timber being a valuable freight at the moment, we were full up with it, including an enormous deck cargo, too much the skipper opined for the time of year. Not that that was his only trouble, far from it. Two of his deck-hands being German had been seized and had been impossible to replace; that he had not lost a third, which would have crippled him altogether for practical purposes, was a matter of good luck coupled with a little bluff.

In the engine-room department things, alas, were no happier. The main steam pipe had opportunely burst in harbour, and a fresh section constructed locally had been fitted. Of its merits I know not, but I do know that the chief engineer was most uncompromising on the subject, prophesied that it would give out at the moment when to do so would lead to our either being sunk outright in a gale of wind or would cause our being caught in the dangerous current running due north from North Cape, which would gently and easily convey us to the region of eternal ice. He was a cheery and inspiring soul, that engineer, and we had not been at sea forty-eight hours before he had been able to increase his category of possible disasters by two actual facts, which undoubtedly gave the skipper food for thought. The first was three of the stokers going sick the same day, one being badly scalded, and the other the discovery that he had over-

estimated the coal and that, favoured with good weather and the greatest of luck, we might just manage to creep into Cardiff upon the supply in the bunkers.

Happily, we dodged a heavy gale to the north of Norway by doubling inside North Cape and going down to Tromso, where we counted twenty-seven German mercantile ships waiting for better times. Their crews had all been sent home, and only the captains and engineers—the former mostly with their families—were standing by. Their outlook was not enticing. Our captain told us that he had talked to them ashore, that they were being kept upon practically starvation wages, and that being totally unprovided with clothes and fuel for a Norwegian winter, they would probably have to depend upon the kind-hearted people in Tromso to see them, at any rate in that respect, through the next six months. And if one may judge anything from the opinion of these unfortunate people, it was dead against the war. The expression they used was that it was " silly " and one and all hoped for a speedy termination.

Our skipper was a thorough sportsman, and when we discussed, as we generally did about twenty times a day, the possibilities of being stopped by a German cruiser and searched, he would always finish up, " You have nothing to fear from those Yermans, you are on board my ship, and I don't care a damn for any Yerman. You will stay here."

With considerable anxiety we skirted round gale after gale, never experiencing their full force, but getting plenty of their after effects in the shape of tremendous swells, which soon had an effect upon our cargo, causing us a sharp list to port.

Through a mist of hail and sleet we caught a glimpse of the Shetlands, and forty-eight hours later the first officer told us with great glee that during the night we had been encircled by a British destroyer, which, having made out our nationality, had wished us "bon voyage," at the same time telling us to hug the Irish coast once in the channel, and then to dodge across to Cardiff from Rosslare.

Good luck favoured us to the very end. As we reached the Bristol Channel we had come down to the last ton of coal, our list had increased to twelve degrees, but we just avoided a most tremendous gale. Slowly we threaded our way past Swansea and so up to Barry, where we were peremptorily told to stop, and where an excited official screamed to us that if we had gone another hundred yards we should have been fired upon. However, everything comes to an end, and six hours later we were slowly warped into Cardiff dock, our list having by that time reached to over fifteen degrees, making walking a matter of difficulty.

But that mattered nothing. We were home.

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